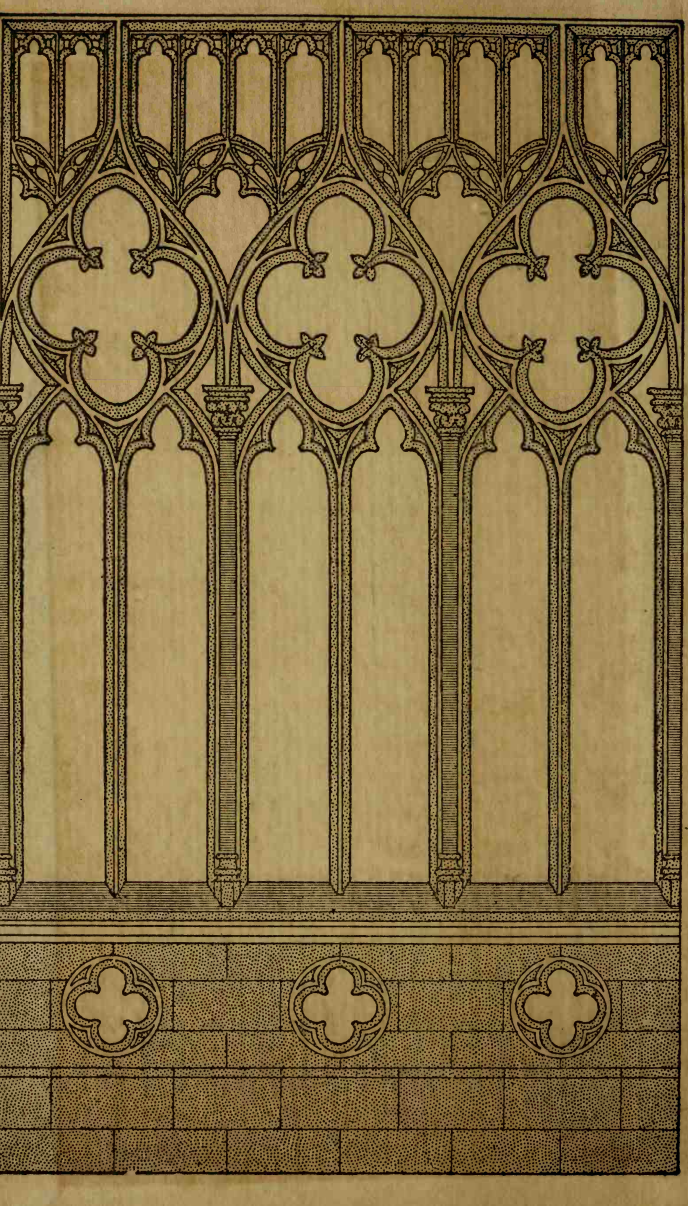

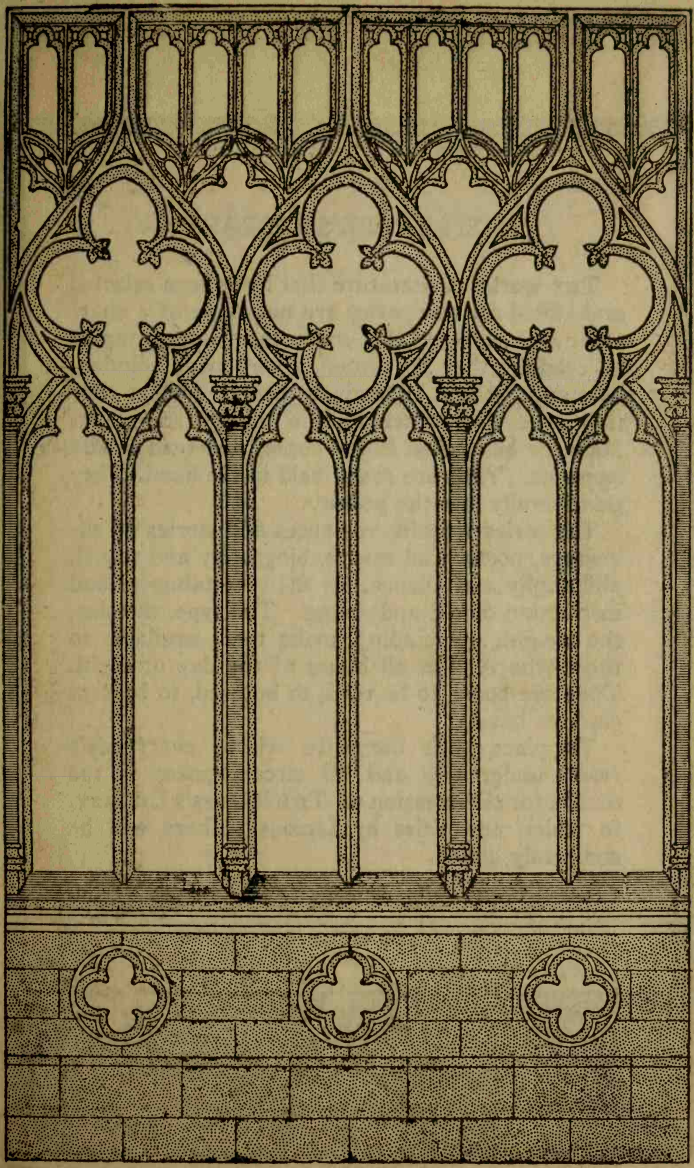

THE READER'S LIBRARY

THE works of literature that have been selected and edited for this series are not alone of a character and standard that make them interesting to all readers; they are issued in well made volumes, substantially and attractively bound, so that they may take their place on the library shelves at home, or be carried in the pocket and read at odd moments. They are easily held in the hand. They go naturally into the pocket.

The series contains romances and stories of adventure, poetry and essays, biography and travel, philosophy and science, for the entertainment and instruction of old and young. The type, the size, the weight, the binding, make them available to those who read at all hours of the day or night. They are books to be read, to be used, to be kept close at hand.

To place such literature within everybody's reach under any and all circumstances is the reason for the creation of THE READER'S LIBRARY, to which new titles by famous authors will be constantly added.

LUCAS LEXOW,
Editor.

MARIAN GREY

BY

MARY J. HOLMES

J. H. SEARS & COMPANY, INC.
PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

Copyright, 1923, by
J. H. SEARS & COMPANY, Inc.

Marion Grey

Set up, Printed and Bound at the
KINGSPORT PRESS
KINGSPORT TENNESSEE
United States of America

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Guardian and Ward	1
II.	Father and Son	9
III.	Death at Redstone Hall	19
IV.	The Bridal Day	29
V.	The Alarm	39
VI.	Marian	45
VII.	Isabel Huntington	53
VIII.	Frederic and Alice	65
IX.	The Yankee Peddler	73
X.	Plans	85
XI.	The Effect	91
XII.	The House on the River	103
XIII.	The Fever	109
XIV.	The Search	127
XV.	Home Again	133
XVI.	The Governess	144
XVII.	Will Gordon	147
XVIII.	Will's Wooing	155
XIX.	The Birthday	163
XX.	Frederic and Alice Visit Marian's Old Home	179
XXI.	The Meeting	185
XXII.	Life at Riverside	193
XXIII.	Redstone Hall	201
XXIV.	Telling Frederic	222
XXV.	"The Lost One Has Returned"	233
XXVI.	Ben	239

MARIAN GREY

CHAPTER I

GUARDIAN AND WARD

THE night was dark and the clouds black and heavy which hung over Redstone Hall, whose massive walls loomed up through the darkness like some huge sentinel keeping guard over the spacious grounds by which it was surrounded. Within the house all was still, and without there was no sound to break the midnight silence, save the sighing of the autumnal wind through the cedar trees or the roar of the river, which, swollen by the recent heavy rains, went rushing on to meet its twin sister at a point well known in Kentucky, where our story opens, as "The Forks of the Elkhorn." From one of the lower windows a single light was shining, and its dim rays fell upon the face of a white-haired man who moaned uneasily in his sleep, as if pursued by some tormenting fear. At last, as the old-fashioned clock struck the hour of twelve, he awoke, and glancing nervously toward the corner, whence the sound proceeded, he whispered:

"Have you come again, Ralph Lindsey, to tell me of my sin?"

"What is it, Mr. Raymond? Did you call?" and a young girl glided to the bedside of the old man, who, taking her hand in his, the better to assure himself of her presence, said: "Marian, is there nothing in that corner yonder—nothing with silvery hair?"

"Nothing," answered Marian, "nothing but the lamp light shining on the face of the old clock. Did you think there was someone here?"

"Yes—no—Marian. Do you believe the dead can come back to us again—when we have done them a wrong—the dead who are buried in the sea, I mean?"

Marian shuddered involuntarily, and cast a timid look to-

ward the shadowy corner, then, conquering her weakness, she answered:

"No, the dead cannot come back. But why do you talk so strangely tonight?"

The old man hesitated a moment ere he replied:

"The time has come for me to speak, so that your father can rest in peace. He has been with me more than once in this very room, and tonight I fancied he was here again, asking why I had dealt so falsely with his child."

"Falsely!" cried Marian, kissing tenderly the hand of the only parent she had ever known. "Not falsely, I am sure, for you have been most kind to me."

"And yet, Marian," he said, "I have done you a wrong—a wrong which has eaten into my very soul and worn my life away. I did not intend to speak of it tonight, but something, I know not what, prompts me to do so, and you must listen. On that night when your father died, and when all in the ship, save ourselves and the watch, were asleep, I laid my hand on his forehead and swore to be faithful to my trust. Do you hear, Marian?—faithful to my trust. You don't know what that meant, but I know, and I've broken my word—broken my oath to the dying—and from that grave in the ocean he comes to me sometimes, and with the same look upon his face which it wore that summer afternoon when we laid him in the sea, he asks me why justice has not been done to you. Wait, Marian, until I have finished," he continued, as he saw her about to speak; "I know I have not long to live, and I would make amends; but, Marian, I would rather—oh, so much rather, you should not know the truth until I'm dead. You will forgive me then more readily, won't you, Marian? Promise me you will forgive the poor old man who has loved you so much—loved you, if possible, better than he loved his only son."

He paused for her reply, and, half bewildered, Marian answered:

"I don't know what you mean, but if, as you say, a wrong has been done, no matter how great that wrong may be, it is freely forgiven for the sake of what you've been to me."

The sick man wound his arm lovingly around her, and, bringing her nearer to him, he said:

"Bless, you, Marian—bless you for that. It makes my death bed easier. I will leave it in writing—my confession. I cannot tell it now, for I could not bear to see upon your face that you despised me. You wrote to Frederic, did you, and told him to come quickly?"

"Yes," returned Marian, "I said you were very sick and wished to see him at once."

For a moment there was silence in the room; then, removing his arm from the neck of the young girl, the old man raised himself upon his elbow, and, looking her steadily in the face, said:

"Marian, could you love my son Frederic?"

The question was a strange one, but Marian Lindsey was accustomed to strange modes of speech in her guardian, and with a slightly heightened color she answered quietly:

"I do love him as a brother—"

"Yes, but I would have you love him as something nearer," returned her guardian. "Ever since I took you for my child it has been the cherished object of my life that you should be his wife."

There was a nervous start and an increase of color in Marian's face, for the idea, though not altogether disagreeable, was a new one to her, but she made no reply, and her guardian continued:

"I am selfish in this wish, though not wholly so. I know you could be happy with him, and in no other way can my good name be saved from disgrace. Promise me, Marian, that you will be his wife very soon after I am dead, and before all Kentucky is talking of my sin. You are not too young. You will be sixteen in a few months, and many marry as early as that."

"Does he wish it?" asked Marian timidly. Her guardian replied:

"He has known you but little of late, but when he sees you here at home and learns how gentle and good you are, he cannot help loving you as you deserve."

"Yes, he can," answered Marian with childish simplicity. "No man as handsome as Frederic ever loved a girl with an ugly face, and I heard him tell Will Gordon, when they spent a vacation here, that I was a nice little girl, but altogether too freckled, too red-headed and scrawny, ever to make a handsome woman," and Marian's voice trembled slightly as she recalled a speech which had wrung from her many tears.

To this remark Col. Raymond made no reply, for he, too, had cause to doubt Frederic's willingness to marry a girl who boasted so few personal charms as did Marian Lindsey then. Rumors, too, he had heard, of a peerlessly beautiful creature, with raven hair and eyes of deepest black, who at the North kept his son a captive to her will. But this could not be; Frederic must marry Marian, for in no other way could the

name of Raymond be saved from disgrace, or the vast possessions he called his own be kept in the family.

He was about to speak again when a heavy tread in the hall announced the approach of someone, and a moment later Aunt Dinah, the housekeeper, appeared.

She had "come to sit up with marster," she said, "and let Miss Marian go to bed, where children like her ought to be."

Thirteen years before our story opens, Marian had embarked with her father on board a ship which sailed from Liverpool to New York. Of that father she remembered little save that he was very poor and that he talked of his poverty as if it was something of which he was proud. Pleasant memories, though, she had of an American gentleman who used often to take her on his lap and tell her of the land to which she was going; and when one day her father laid down in his berth, and the fever was raging, she remembered how the kind man had cared for him, holding his aching head and watching by him till he died; then, when it was all over, he had taken her again upon his knee and told her she was to be his little girl now, and he bade her call him father, telling her how her own dead parent had asked him to care for her, who in all the wide world had no near relative. Something, too, she remembered about an old coarse bag, which had troubled her new father very much, and which he had finally put in the bottom of his trunk, throwing overboard a few articles of clothing to make room for it. The voyage was long and stormy, but they reached New York at last, and he took her to his home—not Redstone Hall, but an humble farmhouse on the Hudson, where he had always lived. Frederic was a boy then—a dark-haired, handsome boy of eleven, and even now she shuddered as she remembered how he used to tease and worry her. Still, he liked her, she was sure, and the first real grief she remembered was on that rainy day when, with an extra pull at her long curls, he bade her good-bye and went off to a distant boarding school.

Col. Raymond, her guardian, was growing rich, and people said he must have entered into some fortunate speculation while abroad, for, since his return, prosperity had attended every movement; and when, six months after Frederic's departure, he went to Kentucky and purchased Redstone Hall, then a rather dilapidated building, Mrs. Burt, his housekeeper, had wondered where all his money came from, when he used to be so poor. They had moved to Kentucky when Marian was five and a half years old, and now, after ten years' improvement, there was not in the whole county so beautiful a

spot as Redstone Hall, with its terraced grounds, its graveled walks, its plots of grass, its grand old trees, its creeping vines, its flowering shrubs, and handsome parks in the rear. And this was Marian's home; here she had lived a rather secluded life, for only when Frederic was with them did they see much company, and all the knowledge she had of the world was what she gleaned from books or learned from the negress, Dinah, who, "having lived with the very first families," frequently entertained her young mistress with stories of "the quality" and the dinner parties at which her presence was once so indispensable. And Marian, listening to these glowing descriptions of satin dresses, diamonds, and feathers, sometimes wished that she were rich and could have a taste of fashion. To be sure, her guardian bought her always more than she needed, but it was not hers, and without any particular reason why she should do so she felt that she was a dependent and something of an inferior, especially when Frederic came home from college with his aristocratic manners, his genteel dress, his graceful mustache, and the soft scent of perfumery he usually carried with him. He was always polite and kind to Marian, but she felt that there was a gulf between them. He was handsome—she was plain; he was rich—she was poor; he was educated, and she—alas, for Marian's education—she read a great deal, but never yet had she given herself up to a systematic course of study. Governesses she had in plenty, but she usually coaxed them off into the woods, or down by the river, where she left them to do what they pleased while she learned many a lesson from the great book of nature, spread out so beautifully before her. All this had tended to make and keep her a very child, and it was not until her fourteenth year that anything occurred to develop the genuine womanly qualities which she possessed.

By the death of a distant relative, a little unfortunate blind girl was left to Col. Raymond's care, and was immediately taken to Redstone Hall, where she became the pet of Marian, who loved nothing in the whole world as dearly as the poor blind Alice. And well was that love repaid; for to the child, six years of age, Marian Lindsey was the embodiment of everything beautiful, pure and good. Frederic, on the contrary, was a kind of terror to the little Alice. "He was so precise and stuck up," she said; "and when he was at home, Marian was not a bit like herself." To Marian, however, his occasional visits to Redstone Hall were sources of great pleasure. To look at his handsome figure, to listen to his voice, to anticipate his slightest wish and minister to his wants so

quietly that he scarcely knew from whom the attention came, was happiness for her, and when he smiled upon her, as he often did, calling her "A good little girl," she felt repaid for all she had done. Occasionally, since her guardian's illness, she had thought of the future when some fine lady might possibly come to Redstone Hall as its mistress, but the subject was an unpleasant one, and she always dismissed it from her mind. In her estimation, there were few worthy to be the wife of Frederic—certainly not herself—and when the idea was suggested to her by his father she regarded it as an utter impossibility. Still, it kept her wakeful, and once she said softly to herself, "I could love him so much if he would let me, and I should be so proud of him, too." Then, as she remembered the remark she had heard him make to his college friend, she covered her face with her hands and whispered sadly: "Oh, I wish I wasn't ugly." Anon, however, there came stealing over her the thought that in the estimation of others she was not as plain as in that of Frederic Raymond. Everybody seemed to like her, and if she were hideous looking they could not. Alice, whose darkened eyes had never looked upon the light of day, and who judged by the touch alone, declared that she was beautiful, while old Dinah said that age would improve her as it did wine, and that in time she would be the handsomest woman in all Kentucky.

The next day, somewhat to her disappointment, her guardian did not resume the conversation of the previous night. He was convinced that Marian could be easily won, but he did not think it wise to encourage her until he had talked with his son, whose return he looked for anxiously. But day after day went by, and it was all in vain that Alice listened, and Marian watched, for the daily stage. It never stopped at their gate; and each time that the old man heard them say that it had gone by, he groaned afresh, fearing Frederic would not come until it was too late, for his sands of life, he knew, were running fast away.

"I can at least tell him the truth on paper," he said to himself at last, "and it may be he will pay more heed to words which a dead father wrote than to words a living father spoke."

Marian was accordingly bidden to bring him his little writing desk and then to leave the room, for he would be alone when he wrote that letter of confession. It cost him many a fierce struggle—the telling to his son a secret which none save himself and God had ever known—aye, which none ever need to know if he would have it so—but he would not. The secret

had worn his life away, and he must make reparation now. So, with the perspiration dropping from every pore, he wrote, and, as he wrote, in his disordered imagination there stood beside his pillow the white-haired Englishman, watching carefully to see that justice was done at last to Marian. Recently several letters had passed between the father and his son concerning the marriage of the latter with Marian—a marriage every way distasteful to the young man, who, in his answer, had said far harsher things of Marian than he usually meant, hoping thus to put an end at once to his father's plan. She was "rough, uncouth, uneducated, and ugly," he said, "and if his father did not give up that foolish fancy he should possibly hate the red-headed fright."

All this the old man touched upon—quoting the very words his son had used, and whispering to himself: "Poor—poor Marian, it would break her heart to know that he said that, but she never will—she never will"; and then, with the energy of despair, he wrote out the great reason why she must be the wife of his son, pleading with him, as only a dying man can plead, that he would not disregard the wishes of his father, and begging of him to forget the dark-haired Isabel, who, though perhaps more beautiful, was not—could not be—as pure, as gentle, and as good as Marian.

The letter was finished, and 'mid burning tears of remorse and shame the old man read it through.

"Yes, that will do," he said. "Frederic will heed what's written here. He'll marry her or else make restitution"; and, laying it away, he commenced the last and hardest part of all —the confessing to Marian how he had sinned against her.

Although there was no tie of blood between them, the gentle young girl had crept down into his inmost heart, where once he treasured a little golden-haired girl, who, before Frederic was born, died on his lap and went to the heaven made for such as she. In the first moments of his bereavement he had thought his loss could never be repaired, but when, with her soft arms around his neck, Marian Lindsey had murmured in his ear how much she loved the only father she had ever known, he felt that the angel he had lost was restored to him tenfold in the little English girl. He knew that she believed there was in him no evil, and his heart throbbed with agony as he nerved himself to tell her how for years he had acted a villian's part, but it was done at last, and with a passionate appeal for her forgiveness, and a request that she would not forget him wholly, but come sometimes to visit his lonely grave, he finished the letter, and folding it up, wrote upon its

back: "For Marian"; then, taking the one intended for Frederic, he attempted to write "For my son," but the ink was gone from his pen—there was a blur before his eyes, and though he traced the words, he left no impress and the letter bore no superscription to tell to whom it belonged. Stepping upon the floor, he dragged his feeble limbs to the adjoining room, his library, and placing both letters in his private drawer, retired to his bed, where, utterly exhausted, he fell asleep.

When at last he awoke, Marian was sitting by his side, and to her he communicated what he had done, telling where the letters were, and that if he died ere Frederic's return, she must give the one bearing the words "For my son" to him.

"You will not read it, of course," he said, "nor ever seek to know what its contents are."

Had Marian Lindsey been like many girls, this caution would have insured the reading of the letter at once, but she fortunately shrank from anything dishonorable, and was blessed with but a limited share of woman's curiosity; consequently the letter was safe in her care, even though no one ever came to claim it. All that afternoon she sat by her guardian, and when as usual the stage thundered down the turnpike, leaving no Frederic at the door, she soothed him with the hope that he would be there tomorrow. But the morrow came and went as did other tomorrows, until at last Col. Raymond grew so ill that a telegram was dispatched to the truant boy, bidding him hasten if he would see his father again alive.

"That will bring him," the old man said, while the big tears rolled down his wrinkled face. "He'll be here in a few days," and he asked that his bed might be moved near the window, where, propped upon pillows, he watched with childish impatience for the coming of his boy.

CHAPTER II

FATHER AND SON

A TELEGRAM from Frederic, who was coming home at last! He would be there that very day, and the inmates of Redstone Hall were thrown into a state of unusual excitement. Old Dinah, in jaunty turban and clean white apron, bustled herself from the kitchen to the dining room, and from the dining room back to the kitchen, jingling her huge bunch of keys with an air of great importance, and kicking from under her feet any luckless black baby which chanced to be in her way, making always an exception in favor of "Victoria Eugenia," who bore a striking resemblance to herself, and would some day call her "gran'mam." Dinah was in her element, for nothing pleased her better than the getting up of a "tiptop dinner," and, fully believing that Frederic had been half starved in a land where they didn't have hoe cake and bacon three times a day, she determined upon giving him one full meal, such as would make his stomach ache for three whole hours at least!

Mr. Raymond, too, was better than usual today, and at his post by the window watched eagerly the distant turn in the road where the stage would first appear. In her chamber Marian too was busy with her toilet, trying the effect of dress after dress, and at Alice's suggestion deciding at last upon a pale blue which harmonized well with her fair complexion.

Suddenly Alice's quick ear caught the sound of the distant stage, and in a few moments Marian, from behind her half-closed shutter, was watching the young man as he came slowly up the avenue which led from the highway to the house. His step was usually bounding and rapid, but now he lingered as if unwilling to reach the door.

"'Tis because of his father," thought Marian. "He fears he may be dead."

But not of his father alone was Frederic thinking then. It was not pleasant, this coming home, for aside from the fear that his father might really die was a dread of what that father might ask of him to do. For Marian, as a sister, he had no dislike, for he knew she possessed many gentle, womanly vir-

tues, but from the thoughts of making her his wife he instinctively shrank. Only one had the shadow of a claim to bear that relation to him, and of her he was thinking that September afternoon as he came up the walk. She was poor, he knew, and the daughter of his landlady, who claimed a distant relationship with his father; but she was beautiful, and a queen might covet her stately bearing and polished, graceful manner. Into her heart he had never looked, for, satisfied with the fair exterior, he failed to see the treachery lurking in her large black eyes, or yet to detect the fierce, stormy passions which had a home within her breast.

Isabella Huntington, or "Cousin Bell," as he called her, was beautiful, accomplished, and artful, and during the year that Frederic Raymond had been an inmate of her mother's family she had succeeded in so completely infatuating the young man that now there was to him but one face in the world, and that in fancy shone upon him even when it was far away. He had never said to her that he loved her, for, though often tempted to do so, something had always interposed itself between them, bidding him wait until he knew her better. Consequently he was not bound to her by words, but he thought it very probable that she would one day be his wife, and as he drew near to Redstone Hall he could not forbear feeling a glow of pride, fancying how she would grace that elegant mansion as its rightful mistress. Of Marian, too, he thought—harsh, bitter thoughts, mingled with softer emotions as he reflected that she possibly knew nothing of his father's plan. He pitied her, he said, for if his father died she would be alone in the world. After what had passed, it would hardly be pleasant for him to have her there where he could see her every day; she might not be agreeable to Isabel either, and he should probably provide for her handsomely and have her live somewhere else—at a fashionable boarding school, perhaps!

The meeting between the father and son was an affecting one—the former sobbing like a child, and asking of the latter why he had tarried so long. The answer to this question was that Frederic had been absent from New Haven for three weeks, and that Isabel, who took charge of his letters, neglected to forward the one written by Marian. At the mention of Isabel the old man's cheek flushed, and he said impatiently, "The neglect was an unpardonable one, for the letter bore on its face 'In haste.' Perhaps, though, she did it purposely, hoping thus to keep you from me."

Instantly Frederic warmed up in Isabels defense, saying she was incapable of a mean act. He doubted whether she had

observed the words "In haste" at all, and if she did she only withheld it for the sake of saving him from anxiety as long as possible.

At this moment there was the sound of little, uncertain feet near the door, and Alice groped her way into the room. She was a fair, sweet-faced little child, and, taking her upon his knee, Frederic kissed her affectionately, and asked her many questions as to what she had done since he was home six months before. Seldom before had he paid her so much attention, and feeling anxious that Marian should be similarly treated, the little girl, after answering his questions, said to him coaxingly: "Won't you kiss Marian, too, when she comes down? She's been ever so long dressing herself and trying to look pretty."

Instantly the eyes of the father and the son met—those of the former expressive of entreaty, while those of the latter flashed with defiance.

"Go for Marian, child, and tell her to come here," said Mr. Raymond.

Alice obeyed, and as she left the room Frederic said bitterly: "I see she is leagued with you. I had thought better of her than that."

"No, she isn't!" cried the father, fearing that his favorite project was in danger. "I merely suggested it to her once—only once."

Frederic was about to reply when the rustling of female garments announced the approach of Marian. To Col. Raymond she was handsome then as, with a heightened bloom upon her cheek and a bashful light in her deep blue eyes she entered timidly and offered her hand to Frederic. But to the jealous young man she was merely a plain, ordinary country girl, bearing no comparison to the peerless Isabel. Still, he greeted her kindly, addressed to her a few trivial remarks, and then resumed his conversation with little Alice, who, feeling that matters were going wrong, rolled her eyes often and anxiously toward the spot where she knew Marian was sitting, and when at last the latter left the room, she said to Frederic: "Isn't Marian pretty in her blue dress, with all those curls? There are twenty of them, for I heard her count them. Say she is pretty, so I can tell her and make her feel good."

Frederic would not then have admitted that Marian was pretty, even had he thought so, and biting his lip with vexation he replied: "I do not particularly admire blue, and I detest corkscrew curls."

Marian was still in the lower hall and heard both the ques-

tion and the answer. Darting up the stairs, she flew to her chamber, and throwing herself upon the bed, burst into a passionate flood of tears. All in vain had she dressed herself for Frederic Raymond's eye; curling her hair in twenty curls, even as Alice had said. He hated blue—he hated curls—corkscrew curls particularly. What could he mean? She never heard the term thus applied before. It must have some reference to their color, and clutching at her luxuriant tresses she would have torn them from her head, had not a little childish hand been laid upon hers and Alice's soothing voice murmured in her ear: "Don't cry, Marian; I wouldn't care for him. He's just as mean as he can be, and if I owned Redstone Hall I wouldn't let him live here, would you?"

"Yes—no—I don't know," sobbed Marian. "I don't own Redstone Hall. I don't own anything, and I 'most wish I was dead."

Alice was unaccustomed to such a burst of passion, and was trying to frame some reply when the dinner bell rang, and lifting up her head Marian said: "Go down, Alice, and tell Dinah I can't come, and, if she insists, tell her I won't!"

Alice knew she was in earnest, and going below she delivered the message to Dinah in the presence of Frederic, who silently took his seat at the table.

"For the dear Lord's sake, what's happened to her now?" said Dinah, casting a rueful glance at Marian's empty chair.

"She's crying," returned Alice, "and she dislikes somebody in this room awfully; 'tain't you, Dinah, nor 'tain't me," and the blind eyes flashed indignantly at Frederic, who smiled quietly as he replied, "Thank you, Miss Alice."

Alice made no reply, and the dinner proceeded in silence.

After it was over Frederic returned to his father, who had been nerving himself for the task he had to perform, and which he determined should be done at once.

"Lock the door, Frederic," he said, "and then sit by me while I say to you what I have so long wished to say."

With a lowering brow Frederic complied, and seating himself near to his father, he folded his arms and said: "Go on, I am ready now to hear, but if it is of Marian you would speak, I will spare you that trouble, father," and Frederic's voice was milder in its tone. "I have always liked Marian very much as a sister, and if it so chances that you are taken from us I will be the best of brothers to her. I will care for her and see that she does not want. Let this satisfy you, father, for I cannot marry her. I do not love her, for I love another; one compared to whom Marian is as the night to the

day. Let me tell you of Isabel, father," and Frederic's voice was still softer in its tone.

The old man shook his head and answered mournfully: "No, Frederic, were she fair as the morning I could not wish her to be your wife. I have never told you before, but I once received an anonymous letter concerning this same Isabel, saying she was treacherous and deceitful, and would lead you on to ruin."

"The villain! It was Rudolph's doings," muttered Frederic; then in a louder tone he said: "I can explain that, I think. When Isabel was quite young she was engaged conditionally to Rudolph McVicar, a worthless fellow whom she has since discarded. He is a jealous, malignant creature, and has sworn to be revenged. He wrote that letter, I am sure. It is like him."

"It may be," returned the father, "but I distrust this Isabel. Her mother, as you are aware, is a distant relative of mine. I know her well, and, though I never saw the daughter, I am sure she is selfish, ambitious, deceitful, and proud, while Marian is so good."

"Marian is a mere child," interrupted Frederic.

"Almost sixteen," rejoined the father, "and before you marry her she will be older still."

"Yes, yes, much older," thought Frederic, continuing aloud: "Listen to reason, father. I certainly do not love Marian, neither do I suppose that she loves me. Now, if you have our mutual good at heart, you cannot desire a marriage which would surely result in wretchedness to both."

"I have thought of all that," returned the father. "A few kind words from you would win Marian's love at once, and when once won she would be to you a faithful, loving wife, whom you would ere long learn to prize. You cannot treat any woman badly, Frederic, much less Marian. I know you would be happy with her, and should desire the marriage even though it could not save me from dishonor in the eyes of the world."

"Father," said Frederic, turning slightly pale, "what do you mean? You have in your letters hinted of a wrong done to somebody. Was it to Marian? If so, do not seek to sacrifice my happiness, but make amends in some other way. Will money repair the wrong? If so, give it to her, even to half your fortune, and leave me alone."

He had touched a tender point, and raising himself in bed, the old man gasped: "Yes—yes, boy; but you have no money to give her. Redstone Hall is not mine, not yours, but hers. Those houses in Louisville are hers, not mine, not yours.

Everything you see around you is hers, all hers; and if you refuse her, Frederic—hear me—if you refuse this Marian Lindsey, strict retribution must be made, and you will be a beggar, as it were. Marry her, and as her husband you will keep it all and save me from disgrace. Choose, Frederic, choose."

Mr. Raymond was terribly excited, and the great drops of perspiration stood thickly upon his forehead, and trickled from beneath his hoary hair.

"Is he going mad?" thought Frederic, his own heart throbbing with a nervous fear of coming evil, but ere he could speak his father continued: "Hear my story, and you will know how I came by these ill-gotten gains," and he glanced around the richly-furnished room. "You know I was sent to England, or I could not have gone, for I had no means with which to meet the necessary expenses. In the streets of Liverpool I first saw Marian's father, and I mistook him for a beggar. Again I met him on board the ship, and making his acquaintance found him to be a man of no ordinary intellect. There was something about him which pleased me, and when he became ill I cared for him as for a friend. The night he died we were alone, and he confided to me his history. He was an only child, and, orphaned at an early age, became an inmate of one of those dens of cruelty—those schools on the Dotheboys plan. From this bondage he escaped at last, and then for more than thirty years employed his time in making and saving money. He was a miser in every sense of the word, and, though counting his money by thousands—yes, by tens of thousands, he starved himself almost to death. No one suspected his wealth—not even his young wife, Mary Grey, whom he married three years before I met him, and who died when Marian was born. She, too, had been an only child and an orphan; and as in all England there was none to care for him or his, he conceived the idea of emigrating to America, and there lavishing his stores of gold on Marian. She should be a lady, he said, and live in a palace fit for a queen. But death overtook him, and to me he intrusted his child with all his money—some in gold, and some in bank notes. And when he was dying, Frederic, and the perspiration was cold on his brow, he made me lay my hand there and swear to be faithful to my trust as guardian of his child. For her, and for her alone, the money must be used. But, Frederic, I broke that oath. The Raymonds are noted for their love of gain, and when the Englishman was buried in the sea, the tempter whispered that the avenue to wealth, which I

so long had coveted, was open now—that no one knew or would ever know of the miser's fortune; and I yielded. I guarded the bag where the treasure was hidden with more than a miser's vigilance, and I chuckled with delight when I counted it out and found it far more than he had said."

"Oh, my father, my father!" groaned Frederic, covering his white face with his hands, for he knew now that he was penniless.

"Don't curse me, boy!" hoarsely whispered the old man; "Marian will not. She'll forgive me—for Marian is an angel; but I must hasten. You remember how I grew gradually rich and people talked of my good luck. Very cautiously I used the money at first, so as not to excite suspicion, but when I came to Kentucky, where I was not known, I was less fearful, and launched into speculation, until now they say I am the wealthiest man in Franklin County. But it's hers—it's Marian's—every cent of it is hers. Your education was paid for with her money; all you have and are you owe to Marian Lindsey, who, by every law of the land, is the heiress of Redstone Hall."

He paused a moment, and, trembling with emotion, Frederic said: "Is there nothing ours, father? Our old home on the Hudson? That, surely, is not hers?"

"You are right," returned the father, "the old shell was mine, but when I brought Marian home it was not worth a thousand dollars, and it was all I had in the world. Her money has made it what it is. I always intended to tell her when she was old enough to understand, but as time went by I shrank from it, particularly when I saw how much you prized the luxuries which money alone can buy, and how that money kept you in the proud position you occupy. But it has killed me, Frederic, before my time, and now at the last do you wonder that I wish restitution to be made? I would save you from poverty and my name from disgrace by marrying you to Marian. She must know the truth, of course, for in no other way can my conscience be satisfied—but the world would still be kept in ignorance."

"And if I do not marry her, oh, father must it come—poverty, disgrace, everything?"

The young man's voice was almost heartbroken in its tone, but the old man wavered not as he answered: "Yes, Frederic, it must come. If you refuse, I must deed it all to her. The lawyer, of course, must know the cause of so strange a proceeding, and I have no faith that he would keep the secret, even if Marian should. I left it in writing in case you did not

come, and I gave you my dying curse if you failed of restoring to Marian her fortune. But you are here—you have heard my story, and it remains for you to choose. You have never taken care of yourself—have never been taught to think it necessary—and how can you struggle with poverty? Would that Isabel join her destiny with one who had not where to lay his head?"

"Stop, father! in mercy stop, ere you drive me mad!" and starting to his feet, Frederic paced the floor wildly, distractedly.

A dark cloud had fallen upon him, and turn which way he would, it wrapped him in its gloomy folds. He knew his father would keep his word, and he desired that he should do so. It was right, and he shrank from any further injustice to the orphan, Marian, with whom he had suddenly changed places. He was the dependent now, and hers the hand that fed him. Frederic Raymond was proud, and the remembrance of his father's words: "Her money paid for your education; all you have and are you owe to Marian Lindsey," stung him to his utmost soul. Still he could not make her his wife. It would be a greater wrong than even his father had done to her. And yet, if he had never seen Isabel, never mingled in the society of beautiful and accomplished women, he might perhaps have learned to love the gentle little girl, whose presence, he knew, made the life and light of Redstone Hall. But he could not do it now, and going up to his father, he said, hesitatingly, as if it cost a bitter, agonized struggle to give up all his wealth: "I cannot do it, father; neither would Marian wish it, if she knew. Send for her now," he continued, as a new idea flashed upon him, "tell her all, here in my presence, and let her choose for me; but stay," he added, quickly, coloring crimson at the unmanly selfishness which had prompted the sending for Marian, a selfishness which whispered that the generous girl would share her fortune with him; "stay, we will not send for her. I can decide the matter alone."

"Not now," returned the father. "Wait until tomorrow at nine o'clock. If you do not come to me then, I shall send for Lawyer Gibson, and the writings will be drawn. I give you until that time to decide; and now leave me, for I would rest."

He motioned toward the door, and glad to escape from an atmosphere which seemed laden with grief, Frederic went out into the open air, and Col. Raymond was again alone. His first thought was of the letter—the one intended for his son. He could destroy that now—for he would not that Marian

should ever know what it contained. She might not be Frederic's wife, but he would save her from unnecessary pain; and exerting all his strength, he tottered to his private drawer, and took the letter in his hand. It was growing very dark within the room, and holding it up to the fading light, the dim-eyed old man read, or thought he read, "For my son."

"Yes, this is the one," he whispered—"the other reads, 'For Marian,'" and hastening back to his bedroom, he threw upon the fire burning in the grate the letter, but alas, the wrong one—for in his drawer still lay the fatal missive, which would one day well-nigh break poor Marian's heart, and drive her forth a wanderer from the home she loved so well.

That night Frederic did not come down to supper. He was weary with his rapid journey, he said, and would rather rest. So Marian, who had dried her tears and half forgotten their cause, sat down to her solitary tea, little dreaming of the stormy scene which the walls of Frederic's chamber looked upon that night. All through the dreary hours he walked the floor, and when the morning light came struggling through the windows, it found him pale, haggard, and older by many years than he had seemed the day before. He heard the clock strike eight, and a moment after breakfast was announced.

"Say I am not ready yet, and tell Marian not to wait," was the message he gave the servant; and so another hour passed by, and heard the clock strike nine.

His hour was up, but he could not yet decide. He walked to the window and looked down upon his home, which never seemed so beautiful before as on that bright September morning. He could stay there if he chose, for he felt sure that he could win Marian's love if he tried. And then he wondered if his life would not be made happier with the knowledge that he had obeyed his father's request and saved his name from dishonor. There was the sound of horses' feet upon the graveled road. It was the negro Jake, and he was going for Lawyer Gibson.

Rapidly another hour went by, and then he heard the sound of horses' hoofs again, but this time there were two who rode—Jake and the lawyer. In a moment the latter was at the door, and the sound of his feet as he strode through the lower hall went to the heart of the listening young man like bolts of ice. He heard a servant call Marian and say that his father wanted her; some new idea had entered into the sick man's head. He had probably decided to tell her all before he died; but it was not yet too late to prevent it, and with a face as white as ashes, and limbs which trembled in every joint, he

hurried down the stairs, meeting in the hall both Marian and the lawyer.

"Go back," he whispered to the former, laying his hand upon her shoulder; "I would see my father first alone."

Wonderingly Marian looked into his pale, worn face and bloodshot eyes; then motioning the lawyer into another room, she, too, followed him thither, while Frederic sought his father's bedside, and bending low, whispered in the ear of the bewildered and half-crazed man that he would marry the heiress of Redstone Hall!

CHAPTER III

DEATH AT REDSTONE HALL

For two days after the morning of which we have written, Col. Raymond lay in a kind of stupor from which he would arouse at intervals, and pressing the hand of his son, who watched beside him, he would whisper, faintly: "God bless you for making your old father so happy. God bless you, my darling boy."

And Frederic, as often as he heard these words would lay his aching head upon the pillow and try to force back the thoughts which continually whispered to him that a bad promise was better broken than kept, and that at the last he would tell Marian all, and throw himself upon her generosity. Since the morning when he made the fatal promise he had said but little to her, though she had been often in the room, ministering to his father's comfort, and once in the evening when he looked more than usuallly pale and weary, she had insisted upon taking his place, or sharing at least in the vigils. But he had declined her offer, and two hours later a slender little figure had glided noiselessly into the room and placed upon the table behind him a waiter, filled with delicacies which her own hand had prepared and which she knew from experience would be needed ere the long night was over. He did not turn his head when she came in, but he thanked her for her thoughtfulness and compelled himself to eat what she brought because he knew how disappointed she would be if, in the morning, she found it all untouched.

And still he was as far from loving her now as he had ever been; and on the second night, as he sat by his sleeping father, he resolved, come what might, he would retract the promise made under such excitement. "When father wakes, I'll tell him I cannot," he said, and anxiously he watched the clock, which pointed at last to midnight. The twelve loud strokes rang through the silent room, and with a short, quick gasp his father awoke.

"Frederic," he said, and in his voice there was a tone never heard there before. "Frederic, has the light gone out, or why is it so dark? Where are we, for I cannot see?"

"The light is burning—here I am," and Frederic took in his the shriveled hand which was cold with appoaching death.

"Frederic, it has come at last, and I am going from you, but before I go lay your hand upon my brow, where the death sweat is standing, and say again what you said two days ago. Say you will make Marian your wife, and that until she is your wife she shall not know what I have done, for that might influence her decision. The letter I have left for her is in my private drawer, but you can keep the key. Promise me, Frederic, promise me both, for I am going very fast."

Twice Frederic essayed to speak, but the words "I cannot," died on his lips, and again in the faint voice—fainter than when it spoke before, said, "Promise, my boy, and save the name of Raymond from dishonor."

It was in vain he struggled to resist his destiny. The pleading tones of his dying father prevailed. Isabel Huntington—Marian Lindsey—Redstone Hall—everything seemed as nought compared with that father's wishes, and falling on his knees, the young man said: "Heaven helping me, father, I will do both."

"And as you have made me happy, so may you be happy and prosper all the days of your life," returned the father, laying his clammy hand upon the brown head of his son. "Tell Marian that dying I blessed her with more than a father's blessing, for she is very dear to me. And the little helpless Alice—she has money of her own, but she must still live with you and Marian. Be kind to the servants, Frederic. Don't part with a single one—and—and—can you hear me, boy? Keep your promise as you hope for heaven hereafter."

They were the last words the old man ever spoke, and when at last Frederic raised his head he knew by the white face lying motionless upon the pillow that he was with the dead.

The next morning the news spread rapidly, not only that Col. Raymond was dead, but also that he had died without a will, this last piece of information being given by Lawyer Gibson, who, a little disappointed in the result of his late visit to Redstone Hall, had several times in public expressed his private opinion that it was all the work of Frederic, who wanted everything himself and feared his father would leave something to Marian Lindsey. This seemed very probable; and in the same breath with which they deplored the loss of Col. Raymond, the neighbors denounced his son as selfish and avaricious. Still he was now the richest man in the county, and it would not be politic to treat him with disrespect, so they came about him with words of sympathy and offers of

assistance, all of which he listened to abstractedly, and when they asked for some directions as to the arrangements for the burial, he answered: "I do not know—I am not myself to-day—but go to Marian. I will abide by her decisions."

So to Marian they went; and hushing her own great grief—for she mourned for the departed as for a well-loved father—Marian told them what she thought her guardian would wish that they should do. When the sun was setting, a long procession wound slowly down the terraced walk, bearing with them one who when they returned came not with them.

Four weeks had passed away since Col. Raymond was laid to rest. At the funeral Frederic had offered Marian his arm, walking with her to the grave and back; but since that night he had kept aloof, seeing her only at the table or when he wished to ask some question which she alone could answer.

In the first days of her sorrow she had forgotten the letter which her guardian had left for her, and when she did remember it and went to the private drawer where he had said it was, she found the drawer locked. Frederic had the key, of course, and thinking that if a wrong had indeed been done to her, he knew it, too, she waited in hopes that he would speak of it, and perhaps bring her the letter. But Frederic Raymond had sworn to keep that letter from her yet a while, and he dared not break his vow. On the night after the burial he, too, had gone to the private drawer, and, taking the undirected missive in his hand, had felt strongly tempted to break its seal and read. But he had no right to do that, he said; all that was required of him was to keep it from Marian until such time as he was at liberty to let her read it. So, with a benumbed sensation at his heart, he locked the drawer and left the room, feeling that his own destiny was fixed and that it was worse than useless to struggle against it. He could not write to Isabel yet, but he wrote to her mother, telling her of his father's death, and saying he did not know how long it would be ere they saw him again at New Haven. This done, he sat down in a kind of torpor and waited for circumstances to shape themselves. Marian would seek for her letter, he thought, and missing the key, would come to him, and then—oh, how he hoped it would be weeks and months before she came, for when she did he knew he must tell her why it was withheld.

Meantime, Marian waited day after day, vainly wishing that he would speak to her upon the subject; but he did not, and at last, four weeks after her guardian's death, she sought the library again, but found the drawer locked, as usual.

"It is unjust to treat me so," she said. "The letter is mine and I have a right to read it."

Then, as she recalled the conversation which had passed between herself and Col. Raymond on that night when he first hinted of a wrong, she wondered if he had said aught to Frederic of her. Most earnestly she hoped not—and yet she was almost certain that he had and this was why Frederic treated her so strangely. "He hates me," she said, bitterly, "because he thinks I want him—but he needn't, for I wouldn't have him now, even if he knelt at my feet and begged of me to be his wife; I'll tell him so, too, the first chance I get," and sinking into the large arm chair, Marian laid her head upon the writing desk and wept.

The day had been rainy and dark, and as she sat there in the gathering night and listened to the low moan of the October wind, she thought with gloomy forebodings of the future and what it would bring to her.

"Oh, it is dreadful to be so homeless—so friendless—so poor," she cried, and in that cry there was a note of desolation which touched a chord of pity in the heart of him who stood on the threshold of the door, silently watching the young girl as she battled with her stormy grief.

He did not know why he had come to that room and he surely would not have come had he expected to find her there. But it could not now be helped; he was there with her; he had witnessed her sorrow—and involuntarily advancing toward her, he laid his hand lightly upon her shoulder, and said: "Poor child—don't cry so hard."

She seemed to him a little girl, and as such he had addressed her; but to the startled Marian it mattered not what he said—there was kindness in his voice, and lifting up her face, which even in the darkness looked white and worn, she sobbed, "Oh, Frederic, you don't hate me, then?"

"Hate you, Marian," he answered; "of course not. What put that idea into your head?"

"Because—because you act so cold and strange and don't come near me when my heart is aching so hard for him—your father."

Frederic made no reply, and resolving to make a clean breast of it, Marian continued: "There's nobody to care for me now, and I wish you to be my brother, just as you used to be, and if your father said anything else of me to you, he didn't mean it, I am sure; I don't, at any rate, and I want you to forget it and not hate me for it. I'll go away from Redstone Hall if you say so; but you mustn't hate me for what I

could not help. Will you, Frederic?" and Marian's voice was again choked with tears.

She had stumbled upon the very subject uppermost in Frederic's mind, and drawing a chair near to her, he said, "I will not profess to be ignorant of what you mean, Marian. My father had some strange fancies at the last, but for these you are not to blame. Did he say nothing to you of a letter?"

"Yes, yes," answered Marian, quickly, "and I've been for it so many times. Will you give it to me now, Frederic? It's mine, you know," and Marian looked at him wistfully.

Frederic hesitated a moment, and misapprehending the motive of his hesitancy, Marian continued:

"Do not fear what I may think. He said a wrong had been done to me, but if it has not affected me heretofore, it surely will not now, and I loved him well enough to forgive anything. Let me have the letter, won't you?"

"Marian," and Frederic trembled with strong emotion. "Marian, the night my father died, I laid my hand upon his head and promised that you should not see that letter until you were a bride."

"A bride!" Marian exclaimed passionately, "I shall never be a bride—never—certainly not yours!" and the little hands worked nervously together, while she continued: "I asked you to forget that whim of your father's. He did not mean it; he would not have it so, and neither would I," and Frederic Raymond could almost see the angry flash of the blue eyes turned so defiantly toward him.

Manlike, he began to feel some interest now that there was opposition, and to her exclamation, "neither would I," he replied softly: "Not if I wish it, Marian?"

The tone rather than the words affected the young girl, thrilling her with a new-born delight; and laying her hand again upon the desk, she sobbed afresh, not impetuously this time, but quietly, steadily, as if the crying did her good. Greatly she longed for him to speak again, but he did not. He was waiting for her, and drying her tears she lifted up her face and in a voice which seemed to demand the truth, she said: "Frederic, do you wish it? Here, almost in the room where your father died, can you say to me, truly, that you wish me to be your wife?"

It was a perplexing question, and Frederic Raymond felt that he was dealing falsely with her, but he made to her the only answer he could: "Men seldom ask a woman to marry them unless they wish it."

"I know," returned Marian, "but do—would you have thought of it if your father had not first suggested it?"

"Marian," said Frederic, "I am much older than yourself, and I might never have thought of marrying you. He, however, gave me good reason why I should wish to have it so—in all sincerity, I ask you to be my wife. Will you, Marian? It seems soon to talk of these things, but he so desired it."

In her bewilderment Marian fancied he had said, "I do wish to have it so," but she would know another thing, and not daring to put the question to him direct, she said, "Do men ever wish to marry one whom they do not love?"

Frederic understood her at once, and for a moment felt strongly tempted to tell her the truth, for in that case he was sure she would refuse to listen to his suit and he would then be free, but his father's presence seemed over and around him, while Redstone Hall was too fair to be exchanged for poverty, and so he answered: "I have always loved you as a sister, and in time I will love you as you deserve. I will be kind to you, Marian, and I think I can make you happy."

He spoke with earnestness, for he knew he was virtually deceiving the young girl, and in his inmost soul he determined to repair the wrong by learning to love her, as he said.

"And suppose I refuse you, what then?"

Marian spoke decidedly, and something in her manner startled Frederic, who, now that he had gone thus far, did not care to be thwarted.

"You will not refuse me, I am sure," he said. "We cannot live together here just as we have done, for people would talk."

"I can go away," said Marian, mournfully, while Frederic replied: "No, Marian, if you will not be my wife, I must go away; Redstone Hall cannot be the home of us both, and if you refuse I shall go—soon, very soon."

"Won't you ever come back?" asked Marian, with childish simplicity; but ere Frederic could answer, the door suddenly opened and old Dinah appeared, exclaiming as her eyes fell upon them: "For the Lord's sake, if you two ain't a-sittin' together in the dark, when I've done hunted everywhar for you," and Dinah's face wore a very knowing look, as setting down the candle she departed, muttering something about "when me and Philip was young."

The spell was broken for Marian, and starting up, she said: "I cannot talk any more tonight. I'll answer you some other time," and she hurried into the hall, where she stumbled upon Dinah, who greeted her with "Ain't you two kinder hankerin'

arter each other, case if you be, it's the sensiblest thing you ever done. Marster Frederic is the likeliest, trimmest chap in Kentuck, and you've got an uncommon heap of sense."

Marian made no reply, but darted up the stairs to her room, where she could be alone to think. It seemed to her a dream, and yet she knew it was a reality. Frederic had asked her to be his wife, and though she had said to herself that she would not marry him even if he knelt at her feet, she felt vastly like revoking that decision! If she were only sure he loved her, or would love her, and then she recalled every word he had said, wishing she would have looked into his face and seen what its expression was. She did not think of the letter in her excitement. She only thought of Frederic's question, and she longed for someone in whom she could confide. Alice, who always retired early, was already asleep, and as her soft breathing fell on Marian's ear, she said: "Alice is much wiser than children usually are at six and a half. I mean to tell her," and stealing to the bedside, she whispered: "Alice, Alice, wake up a moment, will you?"

Alice turned on her pillow, and when sure she was awake, Marian said impetuously: "If you were me, would you marry Frederic Raymond?"

The blind eyes opened wide, as if they doubted the sanity of the speaker, then quietly replying: "No, indeed, I wouldn't," Alice turned a second time upon her pillow and slept again, while Marian, a good deal piqued at the answer, tormented herself with wondering what the child could mean, and why she disliked Frederic so much. The next morning it was Alice who awoke Marian, and said: "Was it a dream, or did you say something to me last night about marrying Frederic?"

For a moment Marian forgot that the sightless eyes turned so inquiringly toward her could not see, and she covered her face with her hands to hide the blushes she knew were burning there.

"Say," persisted Alice, "what was it?" and half willingly, half reluctantly, Marian told of the strange request which Frederic had made, saying nothing, however, of the letter, for if Col. Raymond had done her a wrong, she felt it a duty she owed his memory to keep it to herself.

When, at the breakfast table, she met Frederic, she was ready to answer his question, but she chose to let him broach the subject, and this he did that evening when he found her alone in his father's room. He had decided that it was useless to struggle with his fate, and he resolved to make the

best of it. How far Redstone Hall, bank notes, stock, and real estate influenced this decision we cannot say, but he was sincere in his intention of treating Marian well, and when he found her by accident in his father's room, he said to her kindly: "Can you answer me now?"

Marian was not yet enough accustomed to the world to conceal whatever she felt, and with the light of a new happiness shining on her childish face, she went up to him, and laying her hand confidingly upon his, she said: "I will marry you, Frederic, if you wish me to."

A strange enigma is human nature. When the previous night she had hesitated to answer, Frederic was conscious of a vague fear that she might say no, and now that she had said yes, he felt less pleasure than pain, for the die he knew was cast. A more observing eye than Marian's would have seen the dark shadow which flitted over his face, and the sudden paling of his lips, but she did not; she only saw how he shook off her hand without even so much as touching it.

And thus, without caress or word of love, was that ill-starred engagement sealed, forming a striking contrast to the one which years after took place within that large room and at that very hour; Frederic knew well that Marian was too much of a child to manage the affair, and after his interview with her, he sought out Dinah, to whom he announced his intentions.

"There is no need of delay," he said, "and two weeks from today is the time appointed. There will be no show—no parade—simply a quiet wedding in the presence of a few friends, who will dine with us, of course. The dinner you must see to, and I will attend to the rest."

Meantime Marian was confiding to Alice the story of her engagement, and wondering if Frederic intended taking a bridal tour. She hoped he did, for she so much wished to see a little of the world, particularly New York, of which she had heard such glowing accounts. But nothing could be less in accordance with Frederic's feelings than a bridal tour, and when Marian once ventured to broach the subject, he said that under the circumstances it would hardly be right to go off and enjoy themselves, so they had better stay quietly at home. And this settled the point, for Marian never thought of questioning his decision. If they made no journey, she would not need any additions to her wardrobe, and she was thus saved from the trouble which usually falls to the lot of brides. Still it was not at all in accordance with her ideas—this marrying without a single article of finery, and once she

resolved to indulge in a new dress, at least. She had ample means of her own, for her guardian had been lavish of his money, always giving her far more than she could use, and during the last year she had been saving funds for the purpose of surprising Alice and the blacks with handsome Christmas presents.

Among the neighbors there was a great deal of talk, and occasionally a few of them called at Redstone Hall, but these only came to go away again and comment on Frederic's strange taste in marrying one so young and so wholly unlike himself. It could not be, they said, that he really cared about the will, else why had he so soon taken Marian to share his fortune with him? But Frederic kept his own counsel, and once when questioned on the subject of his marriage and asked if it were not a sudden thing, he answered haughtily: "Of course not—it was decided years ago, when Marian first came to live with us."

And so amid the speculations of friends, the gossip of Dinah, the joyous anticipations of Marian, and the harrowing doubts of Frederic, the two weeks passed away, bringing at last the eventful day when Redstone Hall was to have once more a mistress.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDAL DAY

"It was the veriest farce in the world, the marriage of Frederic Raymond with a child not yet sixteen"; at least so said Agnes Gibson, of twenty-five, and so said sundry other guests who at the appointed hour assembled in the parlor of Redstone Hall to witness the sacrifice—not of Frederic, as they vainly imagined, but of the unsuspecting Marian.

He knew what he did, and why he did it, while she, blindfolded, as it were, was about to leap into the uncertain future. No such gloomy thoughts as these, however, intruded themselves upon her mind as she stood before her mirror and with trembling fingers made her simple bridal toilet. When first the idea of marrying Frederic was suggested to her nearly as much pride as love had mingled in her thoughts, for Marian was not without her ambition, and the honor of being the mistress of Redstone Hall had influenced her decision. But during the two weeks since her engagement her heart had gone out toward him with a deep absorbing love, and had he now been the poorest man in the world and she a royal princess, she would have spurned the wealth that kept her from him, or gladly have laid it at his feet for the sake of staying with him and knowing that he wished it. And this was the girl whom Frederic Raymond was about to wrong by making her his wife, when he knew he did not love her. But she should never know it, he said—should never suspect that nothing but his hand and name went with the words he was so soon to utter, and he determined to be true to her and faithful to his marriage vow.

Some doubt he had as to the effect his father's letter might have upon her, and once he resolved that she should never see it; but this was an idle thought, not to be harbored for a moment. He had told her when she asked him for it the last time that she should have it on her bridal day; for so his father willed it, and he would keep his word. He had written to Isabel at the very last, for though he was not bound to her by any promise he knew an explanation of his conduct was due to her, and he forced himself to write it. Not a word did

he say against Marian, but he gave her to understand that but for his father the match would never have been made—that circumstances over which he had no control compelled him to do what he was doing. He should never forget the pleasant hours spent in her society, he said, and he closed by asking her to visit the future Mrs. Raymond at Redstone Hall. It cost him a bitter struggle to write thus indifferently to one he loved so well, but it was right, he said, and when the letter was finished he felt that the last tie which bound him to Isabel was sundered, and there was nothing for him now but to make the best of Marian. So when on their bridal morning she came to him and asked his wishes concerning her dress, he answered her very kindly: "As you are in mourning you had better make no change, besides I think black very becoming to your fair complexion."

This was the first compliment he had ever paid her, and her heart thrilled with delight, but when, as she was leaving the room, he called her back and said, still gently, kindly: "Would you as soon wear your hair plain? I do not quite fancy ringlets," her eyes filled with tears, for she remembered the corkscrew curls, and glancing in the mirror at her wavy hair, she wished it were possible to remedy the defect.

"I will do the best I can," she said, and returning to her room, she commenced her operations, but it was a long, tedious process, the combing out of those curls, for her hair was tenacious of its rights, and even when she thought it subdued and let go of the end, it rolled up about her forehead in tight, round rings, as if spurning alike both water and brush.

Marian went on with her task, which was finished at last, and her luxuriant hair was bound at the back of her head in a large, flat knot. The effect was not becoming, and she knew it, but if Frederic liked it she was satisfied, even if Dinah did demur, telling her she looked like "a cat whose ears had been boxed." Frederic did not like it, but after the pains she had taken he would not tell her so, and when she said to him, "I am ready," he offered her his arm and went silently down the stairs to the parlor, where guests and clergyman were waiting.

Whether it was the newness of her position, or a presentiment of coming evil, Marian could not tell, but into her heart there crept a chill as she glanced timidly at the man who stood so silently beside her, and thought, "He is my husband." It was, indeed, a somber wedding—"more like a funeral," the guests declared, as immediately after dinner they took their

leave and commented upon the affair as people always will. Oh, how Frederic longed, yet dreaded to have them go. He could not endure their congratulations, which to him were meaningless, and he had no wish to be alone. He was recovering from his apathy, and could yesterday have been his again, he believed he would have broken his promise. But yesterday had gone, tomorrow had come—it was today now with him, and Marian was his wife. Turn which way he would, the reality was the same, and with an intense loathing of himself and a deep pity for her, he feigned some trivial excuse and went away to his room, where, with the gathering darkness and his own wretched thoughts, he would be alone.

With strange unrest Marian wandered from room to room, wondering if Frederic had so soon grown weary of her presence, and sometimes half wishing that she were Marian Lindsey again, and that the new name by which they called her belonged to someone else. At last when it was really dark —when the lamps were lighted in the parlor and Alice had wept a bitter, passionate good night in her arms and gone to sleep, she bethought her of the letter. She would read it now. She had complied with all the stipulations, and there was no longer a reason why it should be withheld. She went to Frederic's door; but he was not there, and a servant passing in the hall said he had returned to the parlor while she was busy with Alice. So to the parlor Marian went, finding him sitting unemployed and wrapped in gloomy thought. He heard her step upon the carpet, but standing in the shadow as she did, she could not see the look of pain which flitted over his face at her approach.

"Frederic," she said, "I may read the letter now—will you give me the key?"

Mechanically he did as she desired, and then with a slightly uneasy feeling as to the effect the letter might have upon her, he went back to his reflections, while she started to leave the room. When she reached the door she paused a moment to look back. In giving her the key he had changed his position, and she could see the suffering expression on his white face. Quickly returning to his side, she said, anxiously, "Are you sick?"

"Nothing but a headache. You know I am accustomed to that," he replied.

Marian hesitated a moment—then parting the damp, brown hair from off his forehead, she kissed him timidly and left the room. Involuntarily Frederic raised his hand to wipe the spot away, but something stayed the act and whispered to him that

a wife's first kiss was a holy thing and could never be repeated.

Through the hall the nimble feet of Marian sped until she stood within her late guardian's room, and there she stopped, for the atmosphere seemed oppressive and laden with terror.

"'Tis because it's so dark," she said, and going out into the hall, she took a lamp from the table and then returned.

But the olden feeling was with her still—a feeling as if she were treading some fearful gulf, and she was half tempted to turn back even now and ask Frederic to come with her while she read the letter.

"I will not be so foolish, though," she said, and opening the library door, she walked boldly in—but the same Marian who entered there never came out again!

Oh, how still it was in that room, and the click of the key as it turned the slender bolt echoed through the silent apartment, causing Marian to start as if a living presence had been near. The drawer was opened, and she held the letter in her hand, while unseen voices seemed whispering to her: "Oh, Marian—Marian—leave the letter still untouched. Do not seek to know the secret it contains, but go back to the man who is your husband, and by those gentle acts which seldom fail in their effect, win his love. It will be far more precious to you than all the wealth of which you are the unsuspecting heiress!"

But Marian did not understand—nor know why it was she trembled so. She only knew she had the letter in her hand—her letter—the one left by her guardian. It bore no superscription, but it was for her, of course, and fixing herself in a comfortable position, she broke the seal and read:

"My dear child:"

There was nothing in those three words suggestive of a mistake, and Marian read on till, with a quick, nervous start, she glanced forward, then backward, and then read on and on, until at last not even the fear of death itself could have stopped her from that reading. That letter was never intended for her eye—she knew that now, but had the cold hand of her guardian been interposed to wrest it from her, she would have held it fast until she learned the whole. Like coals of living fire the words burned into her soul, scorching, blistering as they burned, and when the letter was finished she fell upon her face with a cry so full of agony and horror that Frederic, in the parlor, heard the wail of human anguish, and started to his feet, wondering whence it came.

With the setting of the sun the November wind had risen,

and as the young man listened, it swept moaning past the window, seeming not unlike the sound he had first heard. "It was the wind," he said, and he resumed his seat, while, in that little room, not very far away, poor Marian came back to consciousness, and crouching on the floor prayed that she might die. She understood it now—how she had been deceived, betrayed, and cruelly wronged. She knew, too, that she was the heiress of untold wealth, and for a single moment her heart beat with a gratified pride, but the surprise was too great to be realized at once, and the feeling was so absorbed in the reason why Frederic Raymond had made her his wife. It was not herself he had married, but her fortune—her money—Redstone Hall. She was merely a necessary incumbrance, which he would rather should have been omitted in the bargain. The thought was maddening, and, stretching out her arms, she asked again that she might die.

"Oh, why didn't he come to me," she cried, "and tell me? I would gladly have given him half my fortune—yes, all—all—rather than to be the wretched thing I am; and he would have been free to love and marry this—"

She could not at first speak the name of her rival, but she said it at last, and the sound of it wrung her heart with a new and torturing pain. She had never heard of Isabel Huntington before, and as she thought how beautiful and grand she was, she whispered to herself: "Why didn't he go back to her and leave me, 'the red-headed fright,' alone. Yes, that was what he wrote to his father. Let me look at it again," and the tone of her voice was bitter and the expression of her face hard and stony as taking up the letter she read for the second time that "she was uncouth, uneducated, and ugly"—and if his father did not give up that foolish fancy, Frederic would positively "hate the red-headed fright." Her guardian had not given up the foolish fancy, consequently there was but one inference to be drawn.

In her excitement she did not consider that Frederic had probably written of her harsher things than he really meant. She only thought: "He loathes me—he despises me—he wishes I was dead—and I dared to kiss him, too," she added. "How he hated me for that, but 'twas the first, and it shall be the last, for I will go away forever and leave him Redstone Hall, the bride he married a few hours ago," and laying her face upon the chair Marian thought long and earnestly of the future. She had come into that room a happy, simple-hearted confiding child, but she had lived years since, and she sat there now a crushed, but self-reliant woman, ready to go out and

contend with the world alone. Gradually her thoughts and purposes took a definite form. She was ignorant of the knotty points of law, and she did not know but Frederic could get her a divorce, but from this publicity she shrank. She could not be pointed at as a discarded wife. She would rather go away where Frederic would never see nor hear of her again, and she fancied that by so doing he would, after a time, at least, be free to marry Isabel. She had not wept before, for her tears seemed scorched with pain, but at the thought of another coming there to take the place she had hoped to fill, they rained in torrents over her white face, and clasping her little hands convulsively together, she cried: "How can I give him up, when I love him so much—so much?"

Gradually there stole over her the noble, unselfish thought that because she loved him so much she would willingly sacrifice herself and all she had for the sake of making him happy, and then she grew calm again and began to decide where she would go. Instinctively her mind turned toward New York City as the great hiding place from the world. Mrs. Burt, the woman who had lived with them in Yonkers and who had always been so kind to her, was in New York she knew, for she had written to Col. Raymond not long before his death, asking if there was anything in Kentucky for her son Ben to do. This letter her guardian had answered and then destroyed with many others, which he said were of no consequence, and only lumbered up his drawer. Consequently there was no possibility that this letter would suggest Mrs. Burt to Frederic, who had never seen her, she having come and gone while he was away at school, and thus far the project was a safe one. But her name—she might sometime be recognized by that, and remembering that her mother's maiden name was Mary Grey, and that Frederic, even if he had ever known it, which was doubtful, had probably forgotten it, she resolved upon being henceforth Marian Grey, and she repeated it aloud, feeling the while that the change was well, for she was no longer the same girl she used to know as Marian Lindsey. Once she said softly to herself, "Marian Raymond," but the sound grated harshly, for she felt that she had no right to bear that name.

This settled, she turned her thoughts upon the means by which New York was to be reached, and she was glad that she had not bought the dress, for now she had no funds with which to meet the expense, and she would go that very night, before her resolution left her. Redstone Hall was only two miles from the station, and as the evening train passed at

half-past nine, there would be ample time to reach it and with a farewell letter, too, to Frederic, for she must tell him how, though it broke her heart to do it, she willingly gave him everything, and hoped he would be happy when she was gone forever. Marian was beautiful then in her desolation, and so Frederic Raymond would have said, could he have seen her with the light of her noble sacrifice of self shining in her eyes and the new-born, womanly expression on her face. The first tearful burst was over, and calmly she sat down to her task, but the storm rose high again and she essayed to write that good-by, which would seem to him who read it a cry of despair wrung from a fainting heart.

"FREDERIC: Dear Frederic [she began], can I, may I say my husband once—just once, and I'll never insult you with that name again?

"I am going away forever, Frederic, and when you are reading this I shall not be at Redstone Hall nor anywhere around it. Do not try to find me. It is better you should not. Your father's letter, which was intended for you, and by mistake has come to me, will tell you why I go. I forgive your father, Frederic—fully, freely forgive him—but you—oh, Frederic, if I loved you less I should blame you for deceiving me so cruelly. If you had told me all, I would gladly have shared my fortune with you. I would have given you more than half, and when you brought that beautiful Isabel home I would have loved her as a sister.

"Why didn't you, Frederic? What made you treat me so? What made you break my heart when you could have helped it? It aches so hard now as I write, and the hardest pain of all is the loss of faith in you. I thought you so noble, so good, and I may confess to you here on paper, I loved you so much—how much you will never know, for I shall not come back to tell you.

"And I kissed you, too. Forgive me for that, Frederic. I didn't know then how you hated me. Wash the stain from your forehead, can't you, and don't lay it up against me? If I thought I could make you love me, I would stay. I would endure torture for years if I knew the light was shining beyond, but it cannot be. The sight of me would make you hate me more. So I give everything I have to you and Isabel. You'll marry her at a suitable time, and when you see how well she becomes your home, you will be glad I went away. If you must, tell her of me, and I suppose you must, speak kindly of me, won't you? You needn't talk of me often, but

sometimes, when you are all alone, and you are sure she will not know, think of poor little Marian, who gave her life away that one she loved the best in all the world might have wealth and happiness.

"Farewell, Frederic—farewell. Death itself cannot be harder than bidding you good-by and knowing it is forever."

And well might Marian say this, for it seemed to her that she dipped her pen in her very heart's blood when she wrote that last adieu. She folded up the letter and directed it to Frederic, then, taking another sheet, she wrote to the blind girl:

"DEAREST ALICE:

"Precious little Alice: If my heart was not already broken, it would break at leaving you. Don't mourn for me much, darling. Tell Dinah and Hetty and the other blacks not to cry, and if I've ever been cross to them, they must forget it, now that I am gone. God bless you all. Good-by—good-by."

The letters finished, she left them upon the desk where they could not help being seen by the first one who should enter, then, stealing up the stairs to the closet at the extreme of the hall she put on her bonnet, veil, and shawl, and started for her purse which was in the chamber where Alice slept. Careful, very careful were her footsteps now, lest she waken the child, who, having cried herself to sleep, was resting quietly. The purse was obtained, as was also a photograph of her guardian which lay in the same drawer, and then for a moment she stood gazing at the little blind girl and longing to give her one more kiss, but she dared not, and glancing hurriedly around the room, which had been hers so long, she hastened down the stairs and out upon the piazza. She could see the light from the parlor window streaming out into the darkness, and drawing near she looked through blinding tears upon the solitary man, who, sitting there alone, little dreamed of the whispered blessings breathed for him but a few yards away. It seemed to Marian in that moment of agony that her very life was going out, and she leaned against the pillar to keep herself from falling.

"Oh, can I leave him?" she thought. "Can I go away forever, and never see his face again or listen to his voice?" and looking up into the sky she prayed that if in heaven they should meet again, he might know and love her there for what she suffered here.

On the withered grass and leaves near by there was a rustling sound as if someone was coming, and Marian drew

back for fear of being seen, but it was only Bruno, the large watch dog. He had just been released from his kennel, and he came tearing up the walk, and, with a low, savage growl, sprang toward the spot where Marian was hiding.

"Bruno, good Bruno," she whispered, and in an instant the fierce mastiff crouched at her feet, and licked her hand with a whining sound, as if he suspected something wrong.

One more yearning glance at Frederic—one more tearful look at her old home, and Marian walked rapidly down the avenue, followed by Bruno, who could neither be coaxed nor driven back. It was all in vain that Marian stamped her little foot, wound her arms around his shaggy neck, bidding him return; he only answered with a faint whine, quite as expressive of obstinacy as words could have been. He knew Marian had no business to be abroad at that hour of the night, and, with the faithfulness of his race, was determined to follow. At length, as she was beginning to despair of getting rid of him, she remembered how pertinaciously he would guard any article which he knew belonged to the family, and, on the bridge which crossed the Elkhorn, she purposely dropped her glove and handkerchief, the latter of which bore her name in full. The ruse was successful, for after vainly attempting to make her know that she had lost something, the dog turned back, and, with a loud, mournful howl, which Marian accepted as his farewell, he laid himself down by the handkerchief and glove, turning his head occasionally in the direction Marian had gone, and uttering low, plaintive howls when he saw she did not return.

Meantime Marian kept on her way, striking out into the fields so as not to be observed, and at last, just as the cars sounded in the distance, she came up to a clump of trees growing a little to the left and on the opposite side of the road from that on which the depot stood. By getting in here no one would see her at the station, and when the train stopped she came out from her concealment, and bounding lightly upon the platform of the rear car, entered unobserved. As the passengers were sitting with their backs toward her, but one or two noticed her when she came in, and these scarce gave her a thought, as she sank into the seat nearest to the door, and drawing her veil over her face, trembled violently lest she should be recognized, or at least noticed and remembered. But her fears were vain, for no one there had ever seen or heard of her, and in a moment more the train was moving on, and she, heart-broken and alone, was taking her bridal tour!

CHAPTER V

THE ALARM

In her solitary bed little Alice slumbered on, moaning occasionally in her sleep, and at last when the clock struck nine, starting up and calling, "Marian, Marian, where are you?" Then, remembering that Marian could not come to her that night, she puzzled her little brain with the great mystery, and wept herself to sleep for the second time.

Dinah, standing in the doorway, heard the whistle of the train as it passed the Big Spring station.

"Who s'posed 'twas half-past nine," she exclaimed; "I'll go this minnit and see if Miss Marian wants me."

Just then another loud piercing howl from Bruno, who was growing impatient, fell upon her ear and arrested her movements.

"What can ail the critter," she said; "and he's down on the bridge, too, I believe."

The other negroes also heard the cry, which was succeeded by another, and another, and became at last one prolonged yell, which echoed down the river and over the hills, starting Frederic from his deep reverie and bringing him to the piazza, where the blacks had assembled in a body.

"'Spects mebby Bruno's done cotched somethin' or somebody down thar," suggested Philip, the most courageous of the group.

"Suppose you go see," said Frederic, and lighting his old lantern Philip sallied out, followed ere long by all his comrades, who, by accusing each other of being "skeered to death," managed to keep up their own courage.

The bridge was reached, and in a tremor of delight Bruno bounded upon Phil, upsetting the old man and extinguishing the light, so that they were in total darkness. The white handkerchief, however, caught Dinah's eye, and in picking it up she also felt the glove, which was lying near it. But this did not explain the mystery, and after searching in vain for man, beast, or hobgoblin, the party returned to the house, where their master awaited them.

"Thar warn't nothing thar, 'cept this yer rag and glove," said Dinah, passing the articles to him.

He took them, and passing to the light saw the name upon the handkerchief, "Marian Lindsey." The glove, too, he recognized as belonging to her, and with a vague fear of impending evil, he asked where they found them.

"On the bridge," answered Dinah; "somebody must have dropped 'em. That handkercher looks mighty like Miss Marian's hemstitched one."

"It is hers," returned Frederic; "do you know where she is?"

"You is the one who orto know that, I reckon," answered Dinah, adding that "she hadn't seen her sence jest after dark, when she went upstairs with Alice."

Frederic was interested now. In his abstraction he had not heeded the lapse of time, though he wondered where Marian was, and once feeling anxious to know what she would say to the letter, he was tempted to go in quest of her. But he did not, and now, with a presentiment that all was not right, he went to Alice's chamber, but found no Marian there. Neither was she in any of the chambers, nor in the hall, nor in the dining room, nor in his father's room, and he stood at last in the library door. The writing desk was open, and on it lay three letters, one for Alice, one for him, the other undirected. With a beating heart he took the one intended for himself, and tearing it open, read it through. When Marian wrote that "she gave her life away," she had no thought of deceiving him, for her giving him up was giving her very life. But he did not so understand it, and sinking into a chair, he gasped, "Great Heaven, Marian is dead!" while his face grew livid and his heart sick with the horrid fear.

"Dead, Marster Frederic," shrieked old Dinah, "who dare tell me my chile is dead!" and bounding forward like a tiger, she grasped the arm of the wretched man, exclaiming, "whar is she dead? and what is she dead for? and what's that she's writ that makes your face as white as a piece of paper? Read and let us hear!"

"I can't, I can't!" moaned the stricken man; "Oh, has it come to this? Marian, Marian—won't somebody bring her back?"

"If marster'll tell me whar to look, I'll find her, so help me, Lord," said Uncle Phil, the tears rolling down his dusky cheeks.

"You found her handkerchief upon the bridge," returned Frederic, "and Bruno has been howling there—don't you see? She's in the river! She's drowned! Oh, Marian—poor Marian, I've killed her, but God knows I did not mean to";

and in the very spot where not long before poor Marian had fallen on her face, the desolate man now lay on his, and suffering in part what she had suffered there.

It was a striking group assembled there. The bowed man, convulsed with strong emotion and clutching with one hand the letter which had done the fearful work. The blacks gathered around, some weeping bitterly, and all petrified with terror, while into their midst when the storm was at its height the little Alice groped her way—her soft hair falling over her white nightdress, her blind eyes rolling around the room and her quick ear turned to catch any sound which might explain the strange proceedings. She had been aroused from sleep by the confusion, and hearing the uproar in the hall and library, had felt her way to the latter spot, where in the doorway she stood asking for Marian.

"Bless you, honey, Miss Marian's dead—drownded," said Dinah, and Alice's shriek mingled with the general din.

"Where's Frederic?" asked the little girl, feeling intuitively that he was the one who needed most sympathy.

At the sound of his name Frederic lifted up his head, and, taking the child in his arms, kissed her tenderly, as if he thus would make amends for his coldness to the lost Marian.

" 'Tain't no way to stand here like rocks," said Uncle Phil at last. "If Miss Marian is in the river, we'd better be a fishin' her out," and the practical negro proceeded to make the necessary arrangements.

Before he left the room, however, he would know if he were working for a certainty, and turning to his master, said: "Have you jest cause for thinkin' she's done drownded herself —'case if you hain't, 'tain't no use huntin' this dark night, and it's gwine to rain, too. The clouds is gettin' black as pitch."

Thus appealed to, Frederic answered: "She says in the letter that she's going away forever, that she shall not come back again, and she spoke of giving her life away. You found her handkerchief and glove upon the bridge with Bruno watching near, and she is gone. Do you need more proof?"

Frederic led the search. Bareheaded, and utterly regardless of the rain which, as Uncle Phil had prophesied, began to fall in torrents, he gave the necessary directions, and when the morning broke, few would have recognized the elegant bridegroom of the previous day in the white-faced, weary man, who, with soiled garments and dripping hair, stood upon the narrow bridge, and in the gray November morning looked mournfully down the river as it went rushing on, telling no secret, if secret, indeed, there were to tell, of the wild despair

which must have filled poor Marian's heart and maddened her brain ere she sought that watery grave.

Before coming out he had hurriedly read his father's letter, and he could well understand how its contents broke the heart of the wretched girl, and drove her to the desperate act which he believed she had committed.

"Poor Marian," he whispered to himself, as he stood upon the bridge, "I alone am the cause of your sad death"; and most gladly would he then have become a beggar and earned his bread by the sweat of his brow, could she have come back again, full of life, of health and hope, just as she was the day before.

But this could not be, for she was dead, he said, dead beyond a doubt, and all there remained for him to do was to find her body and lay it beside his father. So during that day the search went on, and crowds of people were gathered on each side of the river, but no trace of the lost one could be found, and when a second time the night fell dark and heavy around Redstone Hall, it found a mournful group assembled there.

Day after day went by, during which the search was continued at intervals, and always with the same result, until when a week was gone and there was still no trace of her found, people began to suggest that she was not in the river at all, but had gone off in another direction. Frederic, however, was incredulous—she had no money that he or anyone else knew of, or at least but very little. She had never been away from home alone, and if she had done so now, somebody would have seen her ere this, and suspected who it was, for the papers far and near teemed with the strange event, each editor commenting upon its cause according to his own ideas, and all uniting in censuring the husband, who at last was described as a cruel, unfeeling wretch, capable of driving any woman from his house, particularly one as beautiful and accomplished as the unfortunate bride! It was in vain that Frederic winced under the annoyance he could not help himself, and the story went the rounds, improving with each repetition, until at last an Oregon weekly outdid all the rest by publishing the tale under the heading of "Supposed Horrible Murder." So much for newspaper paragraphs.

Meantime Frederic, too, inserted in the papers advertisements for the lost one, without any expectation, however, that they would bring her back. To him she was dead, even though her body could not be found. There might be deep, unfathomable sink-holes in the river, he said, and into one of these she had fallen, and so, with a crushing weight upon his spirits and

an intense loathing of himself and the wealth which was his now beyond a question, he gave her up as lost and waited for what would come to him next.

Occasionally he found himself thinking of Isabel, and wondering what she would say to his letter. When last he saw her, she was talking of visiting her mother's half-brother, who lived in Dayton, Ohio, and he said to her at parting: "If you come as far as that, you must surely visit Redstone Hall."

But he had little faith in her coming, and now he earnestly hoped she would not, for if he had wronged the living he would be faithful to the dead; and so day after day he sat there in his desolate home, brooding over the past—trying to forget the present and shrinking from the future, which looked so hopeless now. Thoughts of Marian haunted him continually, and in his dreams he often heard again the wailing sound, which he knew must have been her cry when she learned how she had been deceived. Gradually, too, he came to miss her presence—to listen for her girlish voice, her bounding step, and merry laugh, which he had once thought rude. Her careful forethought for his comfort, too, he missed —confessing in his secret heart at least that Redstone Hall was nothing without Marian.

And now, with these influences at work to make him what he ought to be, we leave him a while in his sorrow and follow the fugitive bride.

CHAPTER VI

MARIAN

ONWARD and onward—faster and faster—flew the night express, and the wishes of nearly all the passengers kept pace with the speed. One there was, however, a pale-faced, blue-eyed girl, who dreaded the time when the cars would reach their destination and she be in New York! How she had come thus far safely she scarce could tell. She only knew that everybody had been kind to her, and asked her where she wished to go; until now the last dreadful change was made, the blue Hudson was crossed, Albany was far behind and she was fast nearing New York. Night and day she had traveled, always with the same dull, dreary sense of pain—the same idea that to her the world would never be pleasant—the sunshine bright, or the flowers sweet again. Nervously she shrank from observation, and once when a lady behind her, who saw that she was weeping, touched her shoulder and said, "What is the matter, little girl?" she started with fear, but did not answer until the question was repeated—then she replied, "Oh, I'm so tired and sick, and the cars make such a noise."

The lady was greatly interested in the child, as she thought her, and had she been going to New York would have still befriended her, but she left at Newburgh, and Marian was again alone. She had heard much of New York, but she had no conception of it, and when at last she was there, and followed a group through the depot up to Broadway, her head grew dizzy and her brain whirled with the deafening roar. Cincinnati, Louisville, Buffalo, and Albany combined were nothing to this, and in her confusion she would have fallen upon the pavement had not the crowd forced her along. Once, as a richly dressed young lady brushed past her, she raised her eyes and meekly asked where "Mrs. Daniel Burt lived!"

The question was too preposterous to be heeded, even if it were heard, and the lady moved on, leaving Marian as ignorant as ever of Mrs. Daniel Burt's whereabouts. To three or four other ladies the same question was put, but Mrs. Daniel Burt was evidently not generally known in New York, for no one paid the slightest attention to her.

Poor Marian! she knew but little of the great Babylon to which she had come, and she thought it made up of carts, hacks, omnibuses, and people, all hurrying in every direction as fast as they could go. It made her feel dizzy and cross-eyed to look at them, and leaning back against an iron railing, she fell into a kind of conscious sleep, in which she never forgot for an instant the roar which troubled her so much, or lost the gnawing pain at her heart. In this way she sat for a long time, while hundreds of people went by, some glancing sideways at her, and thinking she did not look like an ordinary beggar, while others did not notice her at all.

At last, as the confusion increased, she roused up, staring about her with a wild, startled gaze. People were going home, and she watched them as they struggled fiercely and ineffectually to stop some loaded omnibus, and then rushed higher up to a more favorable locality.

She had no idea of the lapse of time, and she fancied that it might be coming night, when a thought stole over her, "What shall I do, then?"

And while she sat there thus, the night shadows began to fall—the people walked faster and faster—the omnibus drivers swore louder and louder—the crowd became greater and greater—and over Marian there stole a horrid dread of the hour when the uproar would cease; when the streets would be empty, the folks all gone, and she be there alone with the blear-eyed old woman who had seated herself near by, and seemed to be watching her.

"I will ask once more," she thought. "Maybe some of these people knows where she lives." And, throwing back her veil, she half rose to her feet, when a tall, disagreeable-looking fellow bent over her and said: "What can I do for you, my pretty lass?"

For an instant Marian's heart stood still, for there was something in the rowdy's appearance exceedingly repulsive, but when he repeated his question, she answered timidly, "I want to find Mrs. Daniel Burt."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Daniel Burt. I know the old lady well—lives just round the corner. Come with me and I'll show you the way," and the great red, rough hand was about to touch the little slender white one resting on Marian's lap, when a blow from a brawny fist sent the rascal reeling upon the pavement, while a round, good-humored face looked into Marian's, and a kindly voice said, "Did the villain insult you, little girl?"

"Yes—I reckon not—I don't know," answered Marian trem-

bling with fright, while her companion continued: "'Tis the first time he ever spoke civil to a woman, then. I know the scamp well—but what are you sittin' here alone for when everybody else is goin' hum?"

Marian felt intuitively that he could be trusted, and she sobbed aloud: "I haven't any home, nor friends, nor anything."

"Great Moses!" said the young man, scanning her closely, "you ain't a beggar—that's as sure as my name is Ben Burt—and why are you sittin' here for, anyway?"

Marian did not heed his question, so eagerly did she catch at the name mentioned.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, grasping his arm; "are you any relation to Mrs. Daniel Burt, who once lived with the Raymonds at Yonkers?"

"Well, ra-ally, I don't know," answered the honest-hearted Yankee. "And if this don't beat all. I wouldn't wonder if I was once connected to Mrs. Daniel Burt, bein' he brung me up from a little shaver, and has licked me mor'n a hundred times. She's my mother, and if it's her you're looking for, we may as well be travelin', for she lives all of three miles from here."

"Three miles," repeated Marian, "that other man said just around the corner. What made him tell such a lie?"

"You tell," answered Ben, with a knowing wink, which, however, failed to enlighten Marian, who was too glad at having found a protector to ask any questions, and unhesitatingly taking Ben's offered arm, she went with him up the street, until he found the car he wished to take.

When they were comfortably seated and she had leisure to examine him more closely, she found him to be a tall, athletic, good-natured looking young man, betraying but little refinement either in personal appearance or manner, but manifesting in all he did a kind, noble heart, which won her good opinion at once. Greatly he wondered who she was and whence she came, but he refrained asking her any questions, thinking he should know the whole if he waited. It seemed to Marian a long, long ride, and she was beginning to wonder if it would ever end, when Ben touched her arm and signified that they were to alight.

"Come right down this street a rod or so, and we're there," said he, and following whither he led, Marian was soon climbing a long, narrow stairway to the third story of what seemed to her a not very pleasant block of buildings.

But if it were dreary without, the sight of a cheerful blaz-

ing fire, which was disclosed to view as Ben opened a narrow door, raised her spirits at once, and taking in at a glance the tidy rag-carpet, the stuffed rocking-chairs, the chintz-covered lounge, the neat looking supper table spread for two, and the neater looking woman who was making the toast, she felt the pain at her heart give way a little, just a little, and bounding toward the woman, she cried: "You don't know me, I suppose. I am little Marian Lindsey, Col. Raymond's ward."

Mrs. Burt, for it was she, came near dropping her plate of buttered toast in her surprise, and setting it down upon the hearth, she exclaimed: "The last person upon earth I expected to see. Where did you come from, and how happened you to run afoul of Ben?"

"I ran afoul of her," answered Ben. "I found her a cryin' on the pavement with that rascal of a Joe Black makin' b'lieve he was well acquainted with you, and that you lived jest around the corner."

"Mercy me," ejaculated Mrs. Burt, "but do tell a body what you're here for; not but I'm glad to see you, but it seems so queer. How is the old colonel, and that son I never see—Ferdinand, ain't it—no, Frederic, that's what they call him?"

At the mention of Frederic, Marian gave a choking sob and replied: "Col. Raymond is dead, and Frederic—oh, Mrs. Burt, please don't ask me about him now, or I shall surely die."

"There's some bedevilment of some kind, I'll warrant," muttered Ben, who was a champion of all womankind. "There's been the old Harry to pay, or she wouldn't be a runnin' off here, the villain," and in fancy, he dealt the unknown Frederic a far heavier blow than he had given the scapegrace Joe.

"Well, never mind now," said Mrs. Burt, soothingly. "Take off your things and have some supper; you must be hungry, I'm sure. How long is it since you ate?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Marian, a deathli' e paleness overspreading her face; "not since yesterday, I reckon. Where am I? Everything is so confused!" And overcome with hunger, exhaustion and her late fright, Marian fainted in her chair.

Taking her in his arms as if she had been an infant, Ben carried her to the spare room, which, in accordance with her New England habits, Mrs. Burt always kept for company, and there on the softest of all soft beds he laid her down; then, while his mother removed her bonnet and shawl, he ran

for water and camphor, chafing with his own rough fingers her little clammy hands, and bathing her forehead until Marian came back to consciousness.

"There, swallow some cracker and tea, and you'll feel better directly," said Mrs. Burt; and, like a very child, Marian obeyed, feeling that there was something delicious in being thus cared for after the dreadful day she had passed. "You needn't talk to us tonight. There'll be time enough tomorrow," continued Mrs. Burt, as she saw her about to speak; and fixing her comfortably in bed, she went back to Ben, to whom she told all that she knew concerning Marian and the family with whom she had lived.

It was a deep, dreamless sleep which came to Marian that night, for her strength was utterly exhausted, and in the atmosphere of kindness surrounding her, there was something soothing to her irritated nerves. But when the morning broke and the roar of the waking city fell again upon her ear, she started up, and gazing about her room, thought: "Where am I, and what is it that makes my heart ache so?"

Full soon she remembered what it was, and burying her face in the pillow, she wept again bitterly, wondering what they were doing far away at Redstone Hall, and if anybody but Alice was sorry she had gone. A moment after Mrs. Burt's kind voice was heard asking how she was, and bidher be still and rest. But this it was impossible for Marian to do. She could not lie there in that little room and listen to the din which began to produce upon her the same dizzy, bewildering effect it had done the previous day, when she sat on the pavement and saw the omnibuses go by. She must be up and tell the kind people her story, and then, if they said go, she would go away—go back to those graves she had seen yesterday, and lying down in some hollow where that horrid man and blear-eyed woman could not find her, she would die, and Frederic would surely never know what had become of her. She knew she could trust both Mrs. Burt and Ben, and when breakfast was over, she unhesitatingly told them everything, interrupted occasionally by Ben's characteristic exclamations of surprise and his mother's milder ejaculations of wonder.

Mrs. Burt's first impulse was, that if she were Marian she would claim her property, though of course she would not live with Frederic. But Ben said "No"—he'd work his finger nails off before she should go back. His mother wanted someone with her when he was gone, and Marian was sent them by Providence. "Anyway," said he, "she shall live with us a

while, and we'll see what turns up. Maybe this man'll begin to like her, now she's gone. It's nater to do so, and some day he'll walk in here and claim her."

This picture was not a displeasing one to Marian, who through her tears smiled gratefully upon Ben, mentally resolving that should she ever be mistress of Redstone Hall she should remember him. And then it was arranged that Marian Grey, as she chose to be called, should remain where she was, for a time at least, and if no husband came for her, she should stay there always as the daughter of Mrs. Burt, whose motherly heart always yearned toward the unfortunate orphan.

Nearly all of Ben's life had been passed in factories, and though now home on a visit, he was still connected with one in Ware, Mass.

Marian began to think the world was not so cheerless as she had thought it was. Still the old, dreary pain was in her heart—a desolate, homesick feeling, which kept her thoughts ever in one place and on one single object—the place, Redstone Hall, and the object, Frederic Raymond. And as the days went by, the feeling grew into an intense, longing desire to see her old home once more—to look into Frederic's face—to listen to his voice, and know if he were sorry that she was gone. This feeling Mrs. Burt did not seek to discourage, for though she was learning fast to love the friendless girl, she knew it would be better for her to be reconciled to Mr. Raymond, and when one day, nearly four weeks after Marian's arrival, the latter said to her, "I mean to write to Frederic and ask him to take me back," she did not oppose the plan, for she saw how the great grief was wearing the young girl's life away, making her haggard and pale, and writing lines of care upon the childish face.

That night there came to Marian a paper from Ben, who, having far outstayed his time, had returned the week before to Ware. Listlessly she tore open the wrapper, and, glancing at the first page, was about throwing it aside, when a marked paragraph arrested her attention, and, with burning cheeks and fast-beating heart, she read that "Frederic Raymond would gladly receive any information of a young girl who had disappeared mysteriously from Redstone Hall."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet, "I am going home—back to Frederic. He's sent for me—see!" and she pointed out to Mrs. Burt the advertisement. "Can I go to-night?" she continued. "Is there a train? Oh, I am so glad."

Mrs. Burt, however, was more moderate in her feelings. Mr. Raymond could scarcely do less than advertise, she

thought, and to her this did not mean that he wished the fugitive to return for any love he bore for her. Still, she would not dash Marian's hopes at once, though she would save her from the cold reception she felt sure she would meet, should she return to Redstone Hall, unannounced. So, when the first excitement of Marian's joy had abated, she said: "I should write to Mr. Raymond, just as I first thought of doing. Then he'll know where you are, and he will come for you, if he wants you, of course."

That "if he wants you" grated harshly on Marian's ear; but, after her past experience, she did not care to thrust herself upon him, unless sure that he wished it, and concluded to follow Mrs. Burt's advice. So she sat down and wrote to him a second letter, telling him where she was, and how she came there, and asking him, in her childlike way, to let her come back again.

"Oh, I want to come home so much," she wrote; "and if you'll only let me, you needn't ever call me your wife, nor make believe I am—at least, not until you love me, and I get to be a lady. I'll try so hard to learn. I'll go away to school, and maybe, after a good many years are gone you won't be ashamed of me, though I shall never be as beautiful as Isabel. If you don't want me back, Frederic, you must tell me so. I can't feel any worse than I did that day when I sat here in the street and wished I could die. I didn't die then, maybe I shouldn't now, and if you do hate me, I'll stay away and never write again—never let you know whether I am alive or not; and after seven years, Ben Burt says, you will be free to marry Isabel. She'll wait for you, I know. She won't be too old then, will she? I shall be almost twenty-three, but that is young, and the years will seem so long to me if you do not let me return. May I, Frederic? Write, and tell me yes; but direct to Mrs. Daniel Burt, as I shall then be more sure to get it. I dare not hope you'll come for me, but if you only would, and quick, too, for my heart aches so, and my head is tired and sick with the dreadful noise. Do say I may come home. God will bless you, if you do, I'm sure; and if you don't, I'll ask Him to bless you the same."

The letter closed with another assurance that she gave to him cheerfully all her fortune—that she neither blamed his father, nor himself, nor Isabel, nor anybody. All she asked was to come back!

And so, while Marian in the city waits and watches for the message which will, perhaps, bid her come back, and Ben, in

the noisy factory, waits also for a message which shall say she has gone, and his mother is again alone, the letter travels on, and one pleasant afternoon, when the clerk at Cincinnati makes up the mail for Frankfort, he puts that important missive with the rest and sends it on its way.

CHAPTER VII

ISABEL HUNTINGTON

ALL day and all night it had rained with a steady, unrelenting pour, and when the steamboat which plies between Cincinnati and Frankfort stopped at the latter place, two ladies from the lower deck looked drearily over the city, one frowning impatiently at the mud and rain, while the other wished in her heart that she was safely back in her old home, and had never consented to this foolish trip. This wish, however, she dared not express to her companion, who, though calling her mother, was in reality the mistress—the one whose word was law, and to whose wishes everything else must bend.

"This is delightful," the younger lady exclaimed, as holding up her fashionable traveling dress, and glancing ruefully at her thin kid gaiters, she prepared to walk the plank. "This is charming. I wonder if they always have such weather in Kentucky."

"No, miss, very seldom, 'cept on 'strordinary 'casions," said the polite African, who was holding an umbrella over her head, and who felt bound to defend his native State.

The lady tossed her little bonnet proudly, and turning to her mother, continued: "Have you any idea how we are to get to Redstone Hall?"

At this question an old gray-haired negro, who with several other idlers, was standing near, came forward and said: "If it's Redstone Hall whar miss wants to go, I's here with Marster Frederic's carriage. I come to fotch a man who's been out thar trying to buy a house of marster in Louisville."

At this announcement the faces of both ladies brightened perceptibly, and pointing out their baggage to the negro, who was none other than our old friend Uncle Phil, they went to a public house to wait until the carriage came round for them.

"What do you suppose Frederic will think when he sees us," the mother asked, and the daughter replied: "He won't think anything, of course. It is perfectly proper that we should visit our relations, particularly when we are as near to them as Dayton, and they are in affliction, too. He would have been displeased if we had returned without giving him a call."

From these remarks the reader will readily imagine that the ladies in question were Mrs. Huntington and her daughter Isabella. They had decided at last to visit Dayton, and had started for that city a few days after the receipt of Frederic's letter announcing his father's death; consequently they knew nothing of the marriage, and the fact that Col. Raymond was dead only increased Isabel's desire to visit Redstone Hall, for she rightly guessed that Frederic was now so absorbed in business that it would be long ere he came to New Haven again; so she insisted upon coming, and as she found her Ohio aunt not altogether agreeable, she had shortened her visit there, and now with her mother sat waiting in the Mansion House for the appearance of Phil and the carriage. She knew that the Kentuckians were proverbial for their hospitality, and feeling sure that no one would think it at all improper for her mother and herself to visit their cousin, as she called Frederic, she determined, if possible, to prolong that visit until asked to stay with him always. So when Phil came around with the carriage, she said to him, quite as a matter of course: "How is Cousin Frederic since his father's death?"

"Jest tolable, thankee," returned the negro, at the same time saying, "Be you marster's kin?"

"Certainly," answered Isabel, while the negro bowed low, for anyone related to his master was a person of distinction to him.

Isabel had heard Frederic speak of Marian, and when they were nearly halfway home, she put her head from the window and said to Phil: "Where is the young girl who used to live with Col Raymond—Marian was her name, I think?"

"Bless you," returned the negro, cracking his whip nervously, "hain't you hearn how she done got married to marster mighty nigh three weeks ago?"

"Married! Frederic Raymond married!" screamed Isabel; "it is not true. How dare you tell me such a falsehood?"

"'Strue as preachin', and a heap truer than some on't, for I seen 'em joined with these very eyes," said Phil, and, glancing backward at the white face leaning from the window, he drove rapidly on, thinking he wouldn't tell her that the bride had run away—he would let Frederic do that.

Meantime, Isabel, inside, was choking—gasping—crying—wringing her hands and insisting that her mother should ask the negro again if what he had told them was so.

"Man—sir," said Mrs. Huntington, putting her bonnet out

into the rain, "is Mr. Frederic Raymond really married to that girl Marian?"

"Yes, as true as I'm sittin' here. Thursday 'll be three weeks since the weddin'," was the reply, and with another hysterical sob, Isabel laid her head in her mother's lap.

Nothing could exceed her rage, mortification, and disappointment, except, indeed, her pride, and this was stronger than all her other emotions and that which finally aroused her to action. She would not turn back now, she said. She would brave the villain and show him that she did not care. She would put herself by the side of his wife and let him see the contrast. She had surely heard from him that Marian was plain, and in fancy, she saw how she would overshadow her rival and make Frederic feel keenly the difference between them, and then she thought of the discarded Rudolph. If everything else should fail, she could win him back—he had some money, and she would rather be his wife than nobody's!

By this time they had left the highway, for Redstone Hall was more than a mile from the turnpike, and Isabel found ample opportunity for venting her ill-nature. "Such a road as that she never saw before, and she'd like to know if folks in Kentucky lived in the lots. No wonder they were such heathens! you nigger," she exclaimed, as Phil drove through a brook; "are you going to tip us over, or what?"

"Wonder if she 'spects a body is gwine around the brook," muttered Phil, and as the carriage wheels were now safe from the water, he stopped and said to the indignant lady, "mebby miss would rather walk the rest of the way. Thar's a heap wus places in the cornfield, whar we'll be pretty likely to get oversot."

"Go on," snapped Isabel, who knew she could not walk quite as well as the mischievous driver.

Accordingly they went on, and ere long came in sight of the house, which even in that drenching rain looked beautiful to Isabel, and all the more beautiful because she felt that she had lost it. On the piazza little Alice stood, her fair hair blowing over her face and her ear turned to catch the first sound which should tell her of what she hoped was true. Old Dinah, who saw the carriage in the distance, had said there was someone in it, and instantly Alice thought of Marian, and going out upon the piazza, she waited impatiently until Phil drove up to the door.

"There are four feet," she said, as the strangers came up the steps; "four feet, but none are Marian's," and she turned sadly away, when she accidentally trod upon the long skirt of

Isabel, who snatching it away, said angrily, "Child, what are you doing—stepping on my dress?"

"I didn't mean to, I'm blind," answered Alice, her lip quivering and her eyes filling with tears.

"Never you mind that she-dragon," whispered Uncle Phil, thrusting into the child's hand a paper of candy, which had the effect of consoling her somewhat, both for her disappointment and her late unmerited reproof.

"Who is that ar?" asked Dinah, appearing upon the piazza just as Isabel passed into the hall. "Some of marster's kin!" she repeated after Uncle Phil. "For the Lord's sake, what fotched 'em here this rainy day, when we's gwine to have an onery dinner—no briled hen, nor turkey, nor nothin.' Be they quality, think?"

"'Spects the young one wants to be if she ain't," returned Phil, with a very expressive wink, which had the effect of enlightening Dinah with regard to his opinion.

"Some low-flung truck, I'll warrant," said she, as she followed them into the parlor, where Isabel's stately bearing and glittering black eyes awed her into a low courtesy, as she said: "You're very welcome to Redstone Hall, I'm sure. Who shall I tell marster wants to see him?"

"Two ladies, simply," was Isabel's haughty answer, and old Dinah departed, whispering to herself: "Two ladies simple! She must think I don't know nothin' 'bout grarmar to talk in that kind of way, but she's mistakened. I hain't lived in the fust families for nothin'," and knocking at Frederic's door, she told him that two simple ladies were down in the parlor and wanted him.

"Who?" he asked in some surprise, and Dinah replied:

"Anyway, that's what she said—the tall one, with great black eyes jest like coals of fire. Phil picked 'em up in Frankford, whar they got off the boat. They's some o' yer kin, they say."

Frederic did not wish to hear any more, for he suspected who they were. It was about this time they had talked of visiting Dayton, and motioning Dinah from the room, he pressed his hands to his forehead, and thought: "Must I suffer this, too? Oh, why did she come to look at me in my misery?" Then, forcing an unnatural calmness, he started for the parlor, where, as he had feared, he stood face to face with Isabel Huntington.

She was very pale, and in her black eyes there was a hard, dangerous expression, from which he gladly turned away, addressing first her mother, who, rising to meet him, said:

"We have accepted your invitation, you see."

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, and he was trying to stammer out a welcome, when Isabel, who all the time had been aching to pounce upon him, chimed in:

"Where is Mrs. Raymond? I am dying to see my new cousin," and in the eyes of black there was a reddish gleam, as if they might ere long emit sparks of living fire.

"Mrs. Raymond!" repeated Frederic, the name dropping slowly from his lips. "Mrs. Raymond! Oh, Isabel, don't you know? Haven't you heard?"

"Certainly I have," returned the young lady, watching him as a fierce cat watches its helpless prey. "Of course I have heard of your marriage, and have come to congratulate you. Is your wife well?"

Frederic raised his hand to stop the flippant speech, and when it was finished he rejoined: "But haven't you heard the rest—the saddest part of all? Marian is dead!—drowned—at least we think she must be, for she went away on our wedding night, and no trace of her can be found."

The fiery gleam was gone from the black eyes—the color came back to the cheeks—the finger-nails ceased their painful pressure upon the tender flesh—the shadow of a smile dimpled the corner of the mouth, and Isabel was herself again.

"Dead! Drowned!" she exclaimed. "How did it happen? What was the reason? Dreadful, isn't it?" and going over to where Mr. Raymond stood, she looked him in the face, with an expression she meant should say: "I am sorry for you," but which really did say something quite the contrary.

"I cannot tell you why she went away," Frederic answered, "but there was a reason for it, and it has cast a shadow over my whole life."

"Marian was a mere child, I had always supposed," suggested Isabel, anxious to get at the reason why he had so soon forgotten herself.

"Did you get my last letter—the one written to you?" asked Frederic, and upon Isabel's replying that she did not, he briefly stated a few facts concerning his marriage, saying it was his father's dying request, and he could not well avoid doing as he had done, even if he disliked Marian. "But I didn't dislike her," he continued, and the hot blood rushed into his face. "She was a gentle, generous-hearted girl, and had she lived, I would have made her happy."

If by this speech Frederic Raymond thought to deceive Isabel Huntington, he was mistaken, for, looking into his eyes she read a portion of the truth and knew there was something

back of all—a something between himself and his father which had driven him to the marriage. What it was she did not care then to know. She was satisfied that the bride was gone—and when Frederic narrated more minutely the particulars of her going, the artful girl said to herself: "She is dead beyond a doubt, and when I have Redstone Hall, I shall know it, and mother, too!"

Frederic would rather that Isabel had never come to Redstone Hall, but now that she was there, he did not wish her away. It would be inhospitable, he said, and when next morning she came down to breakfast, bright, fresh and elegant in her tasteful wrapper, he felt a pang, as he thought: "Had I done right, she might have been the mistress of Redstone Hall," but it could not be now, he said, even if Marian were dead, and all that day he struggled manfully between his duty and his inclination, while Isabel dealt out her highest card, ingrafting herself into the good graces of the Smitherses by speaking to them pleasant, familiar words, exalting herself in the estimation of the Higginses by her lofty, graceful bearing, and winning Dinah's friendship by praising Victoria Eugenia, and asking if that fine-looking man who drove the carriage was her husband. Then, in the evening, when the lamps were lighted in the parlor, she opened the piano and filled the house with the rich melody of her cultivated voice, singing a sad, plaintive strain, which reminded Alice of poor, lost Marian, and carried Frederic back to other days, when, with a feeling of pride, he had watched her snowy fingers as they gracefully swept the keys. He could not look at them now—he dared not look at her, in her ripe, glowing beauty, and he left the room, going out upon the piazza, where he wiped great drops of sweat from his face, and almost cursed the fate which had made it a sin for him to love the dark-haired Isabel. She knew that he was gone, and rightly divining the cause, she dashed off into a stirring, dancing tune, which brought the negroes to the door, where they stood admiring her playing, and praising her queenly form.

"That's somethin' like it," whispered Hetty, beating time to the lively strain. "That sounds like Miss Beatrice did when she done played the pianner. I 'clare for't, I eenamost wish Marster Frederic had done chose her. 'Case yer know, t'other one done drowned herself the fust night," she added, quickly, as she met Dinah's rebuking glance.

Dinah admired Isabel, but she could not forget Marian; though like her sex, whether black or white, she speculated upon the future, when "Marster Frederic would be done

mournin'," and she wondered if "old miss," meaning Mrs. Huntington, would think it necessary to stay there, too. Thus several days went by, and so pleasant was it to Frederic to have someone in the house who could divert him from his gloomy thoughts, that he began to dread the time when he would be alone again. But could he have looked into the heart of the fair lady, he would have seen no immediate cause of alarm. Isabel did not intend to leave her present quarters immediately, and to this end all her plans were laid. From what she had heard she believed Marian Lindsey was dead, and if so, she would not again trust Frederic away from her influence. Redstone Hall needed a head—a housekeeper—and as her mother was an old lady, and also a relative of Frederic, she was just the one to fill that post. Their house in New Haven was only rented until March, and by writing to some friends they could easily dispose of their furniture until such time as they might want it. Alice needed a governess, for she heard Frederic say so; and though the little pest—this was what she called her to herself—did not seem to like her, she could teach her as well as anyone. It would be just as proper for her to be Alice's governess as for anyone else, and a little more so, for her mother would be with her.

And this arrangement she brought about with the most consummate skill, first asking Frederic if he knew of any situation in Kentucky which she could procure as a teacher. That was one object of her visit, she said. She must do something for a living, and as she would rather teach either in a school, or in a private family, she should be greatly obliged to him if he would assist her a little. Hardly knowing what he was doing, Frederic said something about Alice's having needed a governess for a long time; and, quickly catching at it, Isabel rejoined:

"Oh! but you know I couldn't possibly remain here, unless mother stayed with me. Now, if you'll keep her as a kind of overseer-in-general of the house, I'll gladly undertake the charge of dear little Alice's education. She does not fancy me, I think, but I'm sure I can win her love. I can that of almost anyone—children, I mean, of course"; and the beautiful, fascinating eyes looked out of the window quite indifferently, as if their owner were utterly oblivious of the fierce struggle in Frederic's bosom.

It was several days before Alice was told that Isabel was to be her governess, and then she rebelled at once. Bursting into tears, she hid her face in Dinah's lap, and sobbed: "I can't learn of her. I don't like her. What shall I do?"

"I wish to goodness I had larnin'," answered Dinah, "and I'd hear you say over that foolishness 'bout the world's turnin' round and makin' us stan' on our heads half the time, but I hain't, and if I's you I'd make the best on't. I'll keep my eye on her, and if she makes you do the fust thing you don't want to, I'll gin her a piece of my mind. I ain't afraid on her. Why, Gibson's niggers say how they hearn Miss Agnes say she used to make her own bed whar she come from, and wash dishes, too! Think o' that!"

Thus comforted, Alice dried her tears, and hunting up the books from which she had once recited to Marian, she declared herself ready for her lessons at any time.

"Let it be tomorrow, then," said Isabel, who knew that Frederic was going to Lexington, and that she could not see him even if she were not occupied with Alice.

So, the next morning, after Frederic was gone, Alice went to the schoolroom, and drawing her little chair to Isabel's side, laid her books upon the lady's lap, and waited for her to begin.

"You must read to me," she said, "until I know what 'tis, and then I'll recite it to you."

But Isabel was never intended for a teacher, and she found it very tedious reading the same thing over and over, particularly as Alice seemed inattentive and not at all inclined to remember. At last she said impatiently: "For the pity's sake, how many more times must I read it? Can't you learn anything?"

"Don't—don't speak so," sobbed Alice. "I'm thinking of Marian, and how she used to be with me. It's just six weeks today since she went away. Oh, I wish she'd come back. Do you believe she's dead?"

Isabel was interested in anything concerning Marian, and closing the book, she began to question the child, asking her among other things if Marian did not leave a letter for Mr. Raymond, and if she knew what was in it.

"No one knows," returned the child; "he never told—but here's mine," and drawing from her bosom the soiled note, she passed it to Isabel, who scrutinized it closely, particularly the handwriting.

"Of course she's dead, or she would have been heard from ere this," she said, passing the note back to Alice, who, not feeling particularly comforted, made but little progress in her studies that morning, and both teacher and pupil were glad when the lessons of the day were over.

Before starting for Lexington, Frederic had sent Josh on some errand to Frankfort, and just after dinner the negro

returned. Isabel was still alone upon the piazza when he came up, and as she was expecting news from New Haven, she asked if he stopped at the post office.

"Ye-e-us 'm," began the stuttering negro; "an' I d-d-d-one got a h-h-eap on 'em, too," and Josh gave her six letters—one for herself and five for Frederic.

Hastily breaking the seal of her own letter, she read that their matters at home were satisfactorily arranged—a tenant had already been found for their house, and their furniture would be safely stowed away. Hearing her mother in the hall, she handed the letter to her and then went to the library to dispose of Frederic's. As she was laying them down she glanced at the superscriptions, carelessly, indifferently, until she came to the last, the one bearing the New York post-mark; then, with a nervous start she caught it up again and examined it more closely, while a sickening, horrid fear crept through her flesh—her heart gave one fearful throb and then lay like some heavy, pulseless weight within her bosom. Could it be that she had seen that writing before? Had the dead wife returned to life, and was she coming back to Redstone Hall? The thought was overwhelming, and for a moment Isabel Huntington was tempted to break that seal and read. But she dared not, for her suspicion might be false; she would see Alice's note again, and seeking out the child, she asked permission to take the letter which Marian had written. Alice complied with her request, and darting away to the library, Isabel compared the two. They were the same. There could be no mistake, and in the intensity of her excitement, she felt her black hair loosening at its roots.

"It is from her, but he shall never see it, never!" she exclaimed aloud, and her voice was so unnatural that she started at the sound, and turning, saw Alice standing in the door with an inquiring look upon her face, as if asking the meaning of what she had heard.

Isabel quailed beneath the glance of that sightless child, and then sat perfectly still, while Alice said: "Miss Huntington, are you here? Was it you who spoke?"

Isabel made no answer, but trembling in every limb, shrank farther and farther back in her chair as the little, groping outstretched arms came nearer and nearer to her. Presently, when she saw no escape, she forced a loud laugh, and said: "Fie, Alice. I tried to frighten you by feigning a strange voice. You want your letter, don't you? Here it is. I only wished to see if in reading it a second time I could get any clew to the mystery," and she gave the bit of paper back to

Alice, who, somewhat puzzled to understand what it all meant, left the room, and Isabel was again alone. Three times she caught up the letter with the intention of breaking its seal, and as often threw it down, for, unprincipled as she was, she shrank from that act, and still, if she did not know the truth, she should go mad, she said, and pressing her hands to her forehead, she thought what the result to herself would be were Marian really alive.

"But she isn't," she exclaimed. "I won't have it so. She's dead—she's buried in the river." But who was there in New York that wrote so much like her? She wished she knew, and she might now, too, by opening the letter. If it was from a stranger, she could destroy it, and he thinking it had been lost, would write again. She should die if she didn't know, and maybe she should die if she did.

At all events reality was more endurable than suspense, and glancing furtively around to make sure that no blind eyes were near, she snatched the letter from the table and broke the seal! Even then she dared not read it, until she reflected that she could not give it to Frederic in this condition—she might as well see what it contained; and wiping the cold moisture from her face she opened it and read, while her flesh seemed turning to stone, and she could feel the horror creeping through her veins, freezing her blood and petrifying her very brain. Marian Lindsey lived! She was coming back again—back to her husband, and back to the home which was hers. There was enough in the letter for her to guess the truth, and she knew why another had been preferred to herself. For a moment even her lip curled with scorn at what she felt was an unmanly act, but this feeling was soon lost in the terrible thought that Marian might return.

"Can it be? Must it be?" she whispered, as her hard, black eyes fastened themselves again upon the page blotted with Marian's tears. "Seven years—seven years," she continued; "I've heard of that before," and into the wild tumult of her thoughts there stole a ray of hope. If she withheld the letter from Frederic, and she must withhold it now, he would never know what she knew. Possibly, too, Marian might die, and though she would have repelled the accusation, Isabel Huntington was guilty of murder in her heart, as she sat there alone and planned what she would do. She was almost on the borders of insanity, for the disappointment to her now would be greater and more humiliating than before. She had no home to go to—her arrangements for remaining in Kentucky were all made, and Redstone Hall seemed to her so fair that

she would willingly wait twice seven years, if, at the expiration of that time she were sure of being its mistress. It was worth trying for, and though she had but little hope of success, the beautiful demon bent her queenly head and tried to devise some means of effectually silencing Marian, so that if there really were anything in the seven years the benefit would accrue to her.

"She's a little silly fool," she said, "and this Mrs. Daniel Burt she talked about is just as silly as herself. They'll both believe whatever is told to them. I may never marry Frederic, it is true, but I'll be revenged on Marian. What business had she to cross my path, the little red-headed jade!"

Isabel was growing excited, and as she dared do anything when angry, she resolved to send the letter back.

"I can imitate his handwriting," she thought; "I can do anything as I feel now," and going to her room, she found the letter he had written to her mother.

This she studied and imitated for half an hour, and at the end of that time wrote on the blank page of Marian's letter, "Isabel Huntington is now the mistress of Redstone Hall."

"That will keep her still, I reckon," she said, and taking a fresh envelope, she directed it to "Mrs. Daniel Burt," as Marian had bidden Frederic to do. "'Twas a fortunate circumstance, her telling him that, for 'Marian Lindsey' would have been observed at once," she thought; and then, lest her resolution should fail her, she found Josh and bade him take the letter to the post office at the Forks of Elkhorn and not very far away.

Nothing could suit Josh better than to ride, and stuttering out something which nobody could understand, he mounted his rather sorry-looking horse and was soon galloping out of sight. In the kitchen Mrs. Huntington heard of Josh's destination, and when next she met her daughter, she asked to whom she had been writing.

"To someone, of course," answered Isabel, at the same time intimating that she hoped she could have a correspondent without her mother troubling herself.

The rudeness of this speech was forgotten by Mrs. Huntington in her alarm at Isabel's pale face, and she asked anxiously what was the matter.

"Nothing but a wretched headache—teaching don't agree with me," was Isabel's reply, and turning away she ran up the stairs to her room, where, throwing herself upon the bed, she tried to fancy it all a dream.

Already was she reaping the fruit of the transgression, and

when an hour later she heard the voice of Frederic in the hall, she stopped her ears, and, burying her face still closer in the pillows, wished that either Marian or herself had never seen the light of day.

CHAPTER VIII

FREDERIC AND ALICE

All the day long Frederic had thought of Marian—thought of the little blue-eyed girl, who just six weeks before went away from him to die. To die! Many, many times he said that to himself, and as often as he said it, he thought: "Perhaps she is not dead," until the belief grew strong within him that somewhere he should find her, that very day it might be. He wished he could, and take her back to Redstone Hall, where she would be a barrier between himself and the beautiful temptation which it was so hard for him to resist. Manfully had he struggled against it, the temptation, going always from its presence when the eyes of lustrous black looked softly into his own, and when he heard, as he often did, the full, rich-toned voice singing merry songs, he stopped his ears lest the sweet music would touch a chord which he said was hushed forever.

All about the house was dark, but on the piazza a little figure was standing, and as its dim outline was revealed to him, he said involuntarily: "That may be Marian, and I am glad, or at least I will be glad," and he was hurrying on, when a light from the hall streamed out upon the figure, and he saw that it was Alice waiting for him. Still the impression was so strong that, after kissing her, he asked if no one had been at the hall that day.

"No one," she answered, and with a vague feeling of disappointment, he led her into the house.

Alice's heart was full that night, for accidentally she had heard Old Hetty and Lyd discussing the probable result of Isabel's sojourn among them, and the very idea shocked her, as if they had trampled on Marian's grave.

"I'll tell Frederic," said said to herself, "and ask him if he is going to marry her," and, when, after his supper he went into the library to read the letters which Mrs. Huntington told him were there, she followed him thither.

It was not Frederic's nature to pet or notice children much, but in his sorrow he had learned to love the little helpless girl dearly, and when he saw her standing beside him with a wistful look upon her face, he smoothed her soft brown hair and said: "What does my blind bird want?"

"Take me in your lap," said Alice, "so I can feel your heart beat and know if you tell me true."

He complied with her request, and laying her head against his bosom, she began, "Be we much related?"

"Second cousins, that's all."

"But you love me, don't you?"

"Yes, very much."

"And I love you a heap," returned the little girl. "I didn't use to, though—till Marian went away. Frederic, Marian isn't dead!" and, lifting up her head, Alice looked at him with a truthful, earnest look, which seemed to say that she believed what she asserted.

Frederic gasped a short, quick breath, and Alice continued: "Wouldn't it be very wicked for you to love anybody else? I don't mean me—because I'm a little blind girl—but to love somebody and marry them with Marian alive?"

"Certainly it would be wicked," he replied; and Alice continued: "Aunt Hetty said you were going to marry Isabel, and it almost broke my heart. I never thought before that Marian wasn't dead, but I knew it then. I felt her right there with us, and I've felt her ever since. Dinah, too, said it seemed to her just like Marian was alive, and that she hoped you wouldn't make—perhaps I ought not to tell you, but you don't care for Dinah—she hoped you wouldn't make a fool of yourself. Frederic, do you love Isabel Huntington?"

"Yes," dropped involuntarily from the young man's lips, for there was something about that old little child which wrung the truth from him.

"Did you love her before you married Marian?"

"Yes," he said again, for he could not help himself.

There was silence a moment, and then Alice, who had been thinking of what he told her once before, said, interrogatively: "Marian found it out, and that was why she thought you didn't love her, and went away?"

"That was one reason, but not the principal one."

"Do you think Isabel as good as Marian?"

"No, not as good—not as good," and Frederic was glad that he could pay this tribute to the lost one.

After a moment Alice spoke again:

"Frederic, do you believe Marian is dead?"

"I have always thought so," he answered, and Alice replied: "But you don't know for certain; and I want you to promise that until you do you won't make love to Isabel, nor marry her, nor anybody else, will you, Frederic?" and putting both

her little hands upon his forehead, she pushed back his hair and waited for his answer.

Many times the young man had made that resolution, but the idea of thus promising to another was unpleasant, and he hesitated for a time; then he said:

"Suppose we never can know for certain—would you have me live all my life alone?"

"No," said Alice, "and you needn't, either; but I'd wait ever so long, ten years, anyway, and before that time she'll come, I'm sure. Dinah says maybe she will, and that perhaps we shan't know her, she'll be so changed—so handsome," and as if the power of prophecy were on her, Alice pictured a beautiful woman who might come to them sometime as their lost Marian, and Frederic, listening to her, felt more willing to promise than he had before.

A glow of hope was kindled within his own bosom, and when she finished, he said to her:

"I will wait, Alice—wait ten years for Marian."

As to Marian, strong excitement had worn her strength away, and since she had sent the letter to Frederic, her restless anxiety for the answer made her so weak that she kept her bed nearly all the time, counting the days which must elapse ere she could possibly hope to hear, and then, when the full time was out, bidding Mrs. Burt to wait one more day before she went to the office, so as to be sure and get it. She had made due allowance for delays, and now she was certain that it had come. She would sit up that day, she said, for she felt almost well; and if Frederic told her to come home, she should start tomorrow and get there Saturday night, and she fancied how people would stare at her, and be glad to see her, too, on Sunday, when she first went into church, for she "should go, anyway."

Exchanging her working dress for a more respectable delaine, Mrs. Burt put over the kettle to boil, "for after her walk, she should want a cup of tea," she said, and, leaving Marian to watch a pie baking in the oven, she started on her errand.

"A letter—oh, have you a letter for me?" she attempted to say, when Mrs. Burt came in, but she could not articulate a word, and the good lady, wishing to tease her a little, leisurely took off her overshoes, hung up her shawl, and then said, as indifferently as if the happiness of a young life was not to be crushed by what she had in her pocket, "It rains awfully down street!"

"I know—but the letter—was there a letter?" and Marian's blue eyes looked dark with her excitement. "Yes, child, there was, but where 'twas mailed I don't know. 'Tis directed to me, and is from Kentucky, but I can't make out the postmark more'n the dead. It's some kind of forks, but that postmaster never set the Hudson afire with his writing."

"Forks of Elkhorn," cried Marian, snatching at the letter. "It's Frederic's superscription, too, and dated ever so many days ago. Dear Frederic, he didn't wait a minute before he wrote," and she pressed to her lips the handwriting of Isabel Huntington!

The envelope was torn open—the inclosed sheet was withdrawn, but about it there was a strangely familiar look. Was there a film before Marian's eyes? Was she going blind, or did she recognize her own letter—the one she had sent to Redstone Hall? It was the same—for it said "Dear Frederic" at the top, and "Marian" at the bottom! And he had returned it to her unanswered—not a word—not a line—nothing but silence, as cold, as hard, and as terrible as the feeling settling down on Marian's heart. But yes—there was one line—only one, and it read, oh, horror, could it be that he would mock her thus—that he would tear her bleeding heart and trample it beneath his feet, by offering her this cruel insult:

"Isabel Huntington is now the mistress of Redstone Hall."

This was the drop in the brimming bucket, and if she had suffered death when the great sorrow came upon her once before, she suffered more now a hundredfold. In her ignorance she fancied they were married, for how else could Isabel be mistress there, and she comprehended at once the shame—the disgrace such a proceeding would bring to Frederic, and the wrong, the dishonor, the insult it brought to her. There was a look of anguish in her eye and a painful contraction of the muscles about her mouth. There were purple spots upon her flesh, which seemed wasting away even while she sat there, and a note of agony, rarely heard by human ear, was in her voice, as she cried: "No, no, no—it is too soon—too soon—anything but that," and the little Marian who, half an hour before, had heard the ticking of the clock, lay in the arms of Mrs. Burt, a white, motionless thing, unconscious of pain, unconscious of everything.

Mrs. Burt thought she was dead, as did those who came at her loud call, but the old physician said there was life, adding, as he looked at the blue, pinched lips and shrunken face: "The more's the pity, for she has had some awful blow and if she lives, she'll probably be a raving maniac."

Poor Marian! As time passed on the physician's words seemed likely to be verified. For days she lay in the same deathlike stupor, and when at last she roused from it, 'twas only to tear her hair and rave in wild delirium. At first, Mrs. Burt, who had examined the letter, thought of writing to Frederic and telling him the result of his cruel message, the truth of which she did not believe; but she seldom acted without advice, so she wrote first to Ben, who came quickly, crying like a very child, and wringing his great rough hands when he saw the swaying, tossing form upon the bed and knew that it was Marian.

"No, mother," he said, "we won't write. It's a lie the villain told her, but we will let him be till she's dead. God will find him fast enough, the rascal!" and Ben struck his fist upon the bureau as if he would like to take the management of Frederic into his own hands.

It was a long and terrible sickness which came to Marian, and when the dilirium was on, the very elements of her nature seemed changed. For her hair she conceived an intense loathing; and clutching at her long tresses, she would tear them from her head and shake them from her fingers, whispering scornfully:

"Go, go, you vile red things! He hates you, he loathes you, and so do I."

Ben stayed patiently by Marian, nor experienced one feeling of regret when he heard that, owing to his prolonged absence, his place in Ware had been given to another.

"Nobody cares," he said; "I can find something to do if it's nothin' but sawin' wood."

And when the winter snows were all fallen, and the early March sun shone upon the kitchen walls, Marian awoke at last to consciousness. She was out of danger, the physician said, though it might be long ere her health was fully restored. To Marian, this announcement brought but little joy. "She had hoped to die," she said, "and thus be out of the way," and then she spoke of Redstone Hall, asking if any tidings had come from there since the dreadful message she had received. There was none, for Isabel Huntington guarded her secret well, and Frederic Raymond knew nothing of the white, emaciated wreck which prayed each day that he might be happy with the companion he had chosen.

"If he had only waited," she said to Mrs. Burt and Ben one day when she was able to be bolstered up in bed, "if he had waited and not taken her so soon I shouldn't care so

much, but it's awful to think of his living with her after I wrote that letter."

"Marian," said Ben, a little impatiently, "I'm naturally a fool, so everybody says, but I've sense enough to know that Mr. Raymond never went and married that woman so quick after you came away; 'tain't reasonable at all. Why, they'd mob him—tar and feather him—for you ain't dead, and he's no business with two wives."

Marian's face was whiter than ever when Ben finished speaking, and a bright red spot burned on her cheek as she gasped: "You don't, you can't believe she's there, and not his wife? That would be worse than anything else."

"Of course I don't," returned Ben. "My 'pinion is that she ain't there at all, and he only writ that to make a clean finish of you, or 'tany rate, so't you wouldn't be comin' back to bother him. He calkerlates to have her bimeby, I presume—say in seven years."

"Oh, I wish I knew," said Marian, and Ben replied, "would you rest any easier nights if you did?"

"Yes, a heap," was the answer, and the great blue eyes looked wistfully at Ben, as if anxious that he should clear up the mystery.

"You might write," suggested Mrs. Burt; but Marian shook her head, saying, "I wrote once, and you know my success."

"You certainly wouldn't go back," continued Mrs. Burt; and Marian answered indignantly: "Never! I am sure he hates me now, and I shall not trouble him again. Perhaps he thinks me mean because I read the letter intended for him, and so found it all out. But I thought it was mine until I read a ways, and then I could not stop. My eyes wouldn't leave the paper. Was it wrong in me, do you think?"

"It is what anybody would have done," answered Mrs. Burt, and, changing the subject entirely, Marian rejoined, "Oh, I do wish I knew about this Isabel."

For a time Ben sat thinking; then striking his hands together, he exclaimed: "I've got it, and it's jest the thing, too. I don't want no better fun than that. I've lost my place to Ware, and though I might get another, I've a notion to turn peddler. I allus thought I should like travelin' and seein' the world. I'll buy up a lot of jimcracks and take a bee line for Redstone Hall, and learn jest how the matter stands. I can put on a little more of the Down East Yankee, if you think I hain't got enough, and I'll pull the wool over their eyes. What do you say, wee one?"

"Oh, I wish you would," said Marian, adding in the same

breath, "What will you do, if you find him the husband of Isabel?"

"Do!" he repeated. "String 'em both up by the neck on one string. What do you 'spect I'd do? Honest, though," he continued, as he saw her look of alarm; "if she is his wife, which ain't at all likely, 'tis because he s'posed you're dead, but he knows better now, and I shall tell the neighbors that you're alive and breathin', and they can do with him what they choose—and if they ain't married, nor ain't nothin', I'll do jest what you say."

"Come back, and don't tell Frederic you ever saw or heard of me," said Marian. "I shall not live a great while, and even if I do, I'd rather not trouble him. It would only make him hate me worse, and that I couldn't bear. He knows now where I am, and if he ever wants me, he will come. Don't tell him, nor anyone, a word of me, Ben, but do go, for I long to hear from home."

To Mrs. Burt this project seemed a wild and foolish one, but she rarely opposed her son, and when she saw that he was determined, she said nothing, but helped him all she could.

"You'll be wantin' to send some jimcrack to that blind gal, I guess," he said to Marian one day, and she replied: "I wish I could, but I haven't anything, and besides you mustn't tell her of me."

"Don't you worry," answered Ben. "I've passed my word, and I never broke it yet. I can manage to give her somethin' and make it seem natural. What do you say to makin' her a bracelet out o' them curls of yourn that we shaved off when you were sick?"

"That red hair! Frederic would know it at once," and Marian shook her head ruefully, but Ben persisted. "'Twould look real pretty, just like gingerbread when 'twas braided tight," and bringing out the curls, he selected the longest one, and hurried off.

The result proved his words correct, for when a few days after he brought home the little bracelet, which was fastened with a neat golden clasp, Marian exclaimed with delight at the soft beauty of her hair.

"Darling Alice," she cried, kissing the tiny ornaments, "I wish she could know that my lips have touched it—that it once grew on my head—but it wouldn't be best. She couldn't keep the secret, and you mustn't tell."

"Don't worry, I say," returned Ben. "I've got an idee in my brains for a wonder, and I'm jest as 'fraid of tellin' as you be. So cheer up a bit and grow fat, while I'm gone, for I

want you to be well when I come back, so as to go to school and get to be a great scholar, that Mr. Raymond won't be ashamed of when the right time comes," and Ben spoke as cheerfully as if within his heart there was no grave where during the weary nights when he watched with Marian he buried his love for her, and vowed to think of her only as a cherished sister.

Marian smiled pleasantly upon him, watching him with interest as he made up his pack, consisting of laces, ribbons, muslins, handkerchiefs, combs, and jewelry, a little real, and a good deal brass, "fer the niggers," he said. Many were the charges she gave him concerning the blacks, telling him which ones to notice particularly, so as to report to her.

"Jehosiphat!" he exclaimed at last, "how many is there? I shall never remember in the world, and taking out a piece of paper, he wrote upon it, "Dinah, Hetty, Lyd, Victory, Uncle Phil, Josh, and the big dog. There!" said he, reading over the list, "if I don't bring you news of every one, my name ain't Ben Burt. I'll wiggle myself inter their good feelin's and git 'em to talking of you, see if I don't."

Marian had the utmost confidence in Ben's success, and though she knew she should be lonely when he was gone, she was glad when, at last, the morning came for him to leave them. Ben, too, was equally delighted, for the novelty lent a double charm to the project; and, bidding his mother and Marian good-by, he gathered up his large boxes, and whistling a lively tune, by way of keeping up his spirits, started for Kentucky.

CHAPTER IX

THE YANKEE PEDDLER

THE warm, balmy April day was drawing to a close, and the rays of the setting sun shone like burnished gold on the western windows of Redstone Hall. It was very pleasant there now, for the early spring flowers were all in blossom, the grass was growing fresh and green upon the lawn, and the creeping vines were clinging lovingly to the timeworn pillars, or climbing up the massive walls of dark red stone, which gave the place its name. The old negroes had returned from their labors, and were lounging about their cabins, while the younger portion looked wistfully in at the kitchen door, where Dinah and Hetty were busy in preparing supper. On the back piazza several dogs were lying, and as their quick ears caught the sound of a gate in the distance, the whole pack started up and went tearing down the avenue, followed by the furious yell of Bruno, who tried in vain to escape from his confinement.

"Thar's somebody comin'," said Dinah, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking toward the highway; "somebody with somethin' on his back. You, Josh, go after them dogs, afore they skeer him to death."

Stuttering out some unintelligible speech, Josh started in the direction the dogs had gone, and soon came up to a tall six-footer, who, with short pantaloons, a swallow-tailed coat, a stove-pipe hat, sharp-pointed collar, red necktie, and two huge boxes on his back, presented a rather ludicrous appearance to the boy, and a rather displeasing one to the dogs, who growled angrily, as if they would pounce upon him at once. The club, however, with which he had armed himself kept them at bay, until Josh succeeded in quieting them down.

"Ra-ally, now," began our friend Ben, who vainly imagined it necessary to put on a little, by way of proving himself a genuine Yankee; "ra-ally, now, bootblack, what's the use of keepin' sich a 'tarnal lot o' dogs to worry a decent chap like me?"

It was Josh's misfortune to stammer much more when at all excited, and to this interrogatory he began: "Caw-caw-caw-cause ma-ma-mars wa-wa-want—"

"Great heavens!" interrupted the Yankee, setting down his pack, and eying the stuttering negro as if he had been the last curiosity from Barnum's—"great heavens! will you tell a feller what kind of language you speak?"

"Spe-pe-pe-pecas sa-sa-sa-same ye-e-e you do," returned the negro, failing wholly to enlighten Ben, who rejoined indignantly: "You go to grass, with your lingo"; and, gathering up his boxes, he started for the house, accompanied by Josh and the dogs, the first of which made several ineffectual attempts at conversation.

"Some natural-born fool," muttered Ben, thinking to himself that he would like to examine the boy's mouth and see what ailed it.

After a few minutes they entered the yard, and came up to the other blacks, who were curiously watching the newcomer. Seating himself upon the steps and crossing one leg over the other, Ben swung his cowhide boot forward and back, and greeted them with: "Well, uncles, and aunts, and cousins, how do you dew, and how do you find yourselves this afternoon?"

"Jest tolerable, thanky," answered Uncle Phil, and Ben continued. "Wall, health is a great blessin' to them that hain't got it. Do you calkerlate that I could stay here tonight? I've got a lot of gewgaws," pointing to his boxes—"handkerchers, pins, earrings, and a red and yeller gownd that 'll jest suit you, old gal," nodding to Dinah, who muttered gruffly: "The Lord, if he calls me old, what 'll he say to Hetty?"

Ben saw that he had made a mistake, for black women no more care to be old than their fairer sisters, and he tried to make amends by complimenting the indignant lady until she was somewhat mollified, when he asked again if he could stay all night.

"You, Josh," said Uncle Phil, "go and tell yer marster to come here."

"Whew-ew," whistled Ben, "if you're goin' to send that stutterin' critter, I may as well be joggin', for no human can make out his rigmarole."

But Ben was mistaken. Josh's dialect was well understood by Frederic, who came as requested, and, standing in the door, gazed inquisitively at the singular-looking object seated upon his steps, and apparently oblivious to everything save the sliver he was trying to extract from his thumb with a large pin, ejaculating occasionally: "Gaul darn the pesky thing."

Nothing, however, escaped the keen gray eyes which from

time to time peered out from beneath the stovepipe hat. Already Ben had seen that Redstone Hall was a most beautiful spot, and he did not blame Frederic for disliking to give it up. He had selected Dinah and Phil from the other blacks, and had said that the baby who, with a small white dog, was disputing its right to a piece of fat bacon and a chicken bone, was Victoria Eugenia. Josh he identified by his name, and he was wondering at Marian's taste in caring to hear from him, when Frederic appeared, and all else was forgotten in his eagerness to inspect the man "who could make a gal bite her tongue in two and yank her hair out by the roots, all for the love of him."

Frederic seemed in no hurry to commence a conversation and during the minute that he stood there without speaking Ben had ample time to take him in from his brown hair and graceful mustache down to his polished boots.

"Got up in consider'ble kind of good style," was Ben's mental comment, as he watched the young man carelessly scraping his finger nail with a penknife.

"Did you wish to see me?" Frederic said at last, and with another thrust at the sliver, Ben stuck his pin upon his coat sleeve, and, reversing the position of his legs, replied: "Wall, if you're the boss, I guess I dew; I'm Ben Butterworth from Down East, and I've got belated, and bein' there ain't no taverns near I want to stay all night, and pay in money or notions. Got a lot on 'em, besides some tiptop muslin collars for your wife, Mrs. What-Do-You-Call-Her?" and the gray eyes fastened themselves upon the face, which for a single instant was white as marble—then the hot blood came rushing back, and Frederic replied: "There is no wife here, sir, but you can stay all night if you please. Will you walk in?" and he led the way to the sitting room, followed by by Ben, who had obtained what to him was the most important information of all.

The night was chilly, and in the grate a cheerful coal fire was burning, casting its ruddy light upon the face of a little girl, who, seated upon a stool, with her fair hair combed back from her sweet face, her waxen hands folded together and her strange brown eyes fixed upon the coals as if she were looking at something far beyond them, seemed to Ben like what he had fancied angels in heaven to be. It was not needful for Mr. Raymond to say, "Alice, here is a peddlar come to stay all night," for Ben knew it was the blind girl, and his heart gave a great throb when he saw her sitting there so beautiful, so helpless and so lonely, too, for he almost knew that she was

thinking of Marian, and he longed to take her in his arms and tell her of the lost one.

Motioning him to a chair, Frederic went out, leaving them together. For some minutes there was perfect silence, while Ben sat looking at her and trying hard to keep from crying. It seemed terrible to him that one so young should be blind, and he wanted to tell her so, but he dared not, and he sat so still that Alice began to think she was alone, and, resuming her former thoughts, whispered softly to herself: "Oh, I wish she would come back."

"Blessed baby," Ben had almost ejaculated, but he checked himself in time and said instead, "little gal."

Alice started, and turning her ear, seemed waiting for him to speak again, which he did do.

"Little gal, will you come and sit in my lap?"

His voice was gentle and kind, but Alice did not care to be thus free with a stranger, so she replied: "I reckon I won't do that, but I'll sit nearer to you," and she moved her stool so close to him that her head almost rested on his lap.

"You must 'scuse me," she said, "if I don't act like other children do—I'm blind."

Very tenderly he smoothed her silken hair, and as he did so, she felt something drop upon her forehead. It was a tear, and wiping it away, she said:

"Man, be you hungry and tired, or what makes you cry?"

"I'm cryin' for you, poor, unfortunate lamb"; and the tender-hearted Ben sobbed out aloud.

"Oh, I wouldn't, I wouldn't," said the distressed child—"I'm used to it. I don't mind it now."

The ice was fairly broken, and a bond of sympathy established between the two.

"He must be a good man," Alice thought; and when he began to question her of her home and friends, she replied to him readily.

"You haven't no mother, nor sister, nor a'nt, nor nothin', but Mr. Raymond and Dinah," said Ben, after they had talked a while. "Ain't there no white women in the house but you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Huntington and Isabel. She's my governess," answered Alice; and, conscious of a pang, Ben continued:

"Mr. Raymond sent for 'em, I s'pose?"

"No," returned Alice. "They came without sending for—came to visit, and he hired them to stay. Mrs. Huntington keeps house."

At this point in the conversation there was a rustling of garments in the hall, and a splendid, queenly creature swept

into the room, bringing with her such an air of superiority that Ben involuntarily hitched nearer to the wall, as if to get out of sight.

"Je-ru-sa-lem! Ain't she a dasher?" was his mental exclamation; and, in spite of himself, he followed her movements with an admiring glance.

Taking a chair, she drew it to the fire, and, without deigning to notice the stranger, she said, rather reprovingly:

"Alice, come here."

The child obeyed, and Ben, determined not to be ignored entirely, said:

"Pretty well this evenin', miss?"

"How, sir?" and the black eyes flashed haughtily upon him.

Nothing abashed, he continued: "As't you if you're pretty well, but no matter, I know you to be by your looks. I've got a lot of finery that I guess you want," and, opening his boxes, he spread out upon the carpet the collars and undersleeves, which had been bought with a view to this very night. Very disdainfully Isabel turned away, saying she never traded with peddlers.

"I wonder if you don't," returned Ben, with imperceptible pity; "but, seein' it's me, buy somethin', dew," and he held up to view Marian's soft hair, which, in the bright firelight, looked singularly beautiful.

Isabel did unbend a little now. There was no sham about that, she knew, and taking it in her hand, she tried to clasp it on her round, white arm; but it would not come together. It was not made for her!

"It isn't large enough," said she; "it must have been intended for some child."

"Shouldn't wonder if you hit the nail right on the head," returned Ben, and taking the bracelet, he continued: "Mebby 'twas meant for this wee one—who knows?" and he fastened it on Alice's slender wrist. "Fits to a T," said he, "and you must have it, too. Them clasps is little hearts, do you see?"

Frederic now entered the room, and holding up her arm, Alice said: "Look, is it pretty?"

"Yes, very," he replied, bending down to examine it, while Ben watched him narrowly, wondering how he would feel if he knew from whose tresses that braid was made.

"Harnsome color, ain't it, square?" he said, holding Alice's hand a little more to the light, and continuing: "Now there's them that don't like red hair, but I swan I've seen some that wan't so bad. Now when it curls kinder—wall, like a gim-

let, you know. I've got a gal to hum I call my sister, and her hair's as nigh this color as two peas, or it was afore 'twas shaved. She's been awful sick with heart disorder and fever, and I tell you, square, if you'd 'a' seen her pitchin' and divin', and rollin' from one end of the bed t'other, bitin' her tongue and yankin' out her hair by han'fuls, I rather guess you'd felt kinder streaked. It made a calf of me, though I didn't feel so bad then as when she got weaker and lay so still that we held a feather to her lips to see if she breathed."

"Oh, did she die?" asked Alice, who had been a most attentive listener.

"No," answered Ben, "she didn't, and the thankfulest prayer I ever prayed was the one I made in the buttery, behind the door, when the doctor said she would git well."

Supper was announced, and putting up his muslins, Ben followed his host to the dining room. Alice, too, was at the table, the bracelet still upon her wrist, for she liked the feeling of it. "And she did so wish it was hers."

"I shall have to buy it for you, I reckon," said Frederic, and he inquired its price.

"Wall, now," returned Ben, "if 'twas anybody but the little gal, I should say five dollars, but bein' it's her, I'd kinder like to give it to her."

This, however, Frederic would not suffer. Alice could not keep it, he said, unless he paid for it, and he put a half eagle into the hand of the child, who offered it to Ben. For a moment the latter hesitated, then thinking to himself: "Darn it all, what's the use? If Marian goes to school, and I mean she shall, she'll need a lot of money, and what I get out o' him is clear gain," he pocketed the piece, and the bracelet belonged to Alice.

After supper, Ben sat down by the fire in the dining room, hoping they would leave him with Alice, and this they did ere long, Isabel going to the piano, and Frederic to the library to answer letters, while Mrs. Huntington gave some directions for breakfast. These directions were merely nominal, however, for Dinah to all intents and purposes was mistress of the household, and she now came in to see to the supper dishes, which were soon cleared away; and Ben, as he wished, was alone with Alice. The bracelet seemed to be a connecting link between them, for Alice was not in the least shy of him now, and when he asked her again to sit in his lap, she did so readily.

"That Miss Isabel is a dreadful han'some gal," he began; "I should s'pose Mr. Raymond would fall in love with her."

No answer from Alice, whose sightless eyes looked steadily into the fire.

"Mebby he is in love with her?"

No answer yet, and mentally chiding himself for his stupidity in not striking the right vein, Ben continued:

"I wonder he hain't married afore this. He must be as much as twenty-five or six years old, and so han'some, too!"

"He has been married," and the little face of the speaker did not move a muscle.

"Now you don't say it!" returned Ben. "A widower, hey? How long sense he was married?"

"A few months," and the long eyelashes quivered in the firelight just a little.

"I want to know—died so soon—poor critter. Tell me about her, dew. You didn't know her long, so I s'pose you couldn't love her a great sight?"

The brown eyes flashed up into Ben's face, and the blood rushed to Alice's cheeks, as she replied: "Me not love Marian! Oh, I loved her so much!"

The right chord was touched at last, and in her own way Alice told the sad story—how Marian had left them on her bridal night, and though they searched for her everywhere, both in the river and through the country, no trace of her could be found, and the conviction was forced upon them that she was dead.

"Je-ru-sa-lem! I never thought of that!" was Ben's involuntary exclamation; but it conveyed no meaning to Alice, and when he asked if they still believed her dead she answered:

"I don't quite believe Frederic does. I don't, anyway. I used to, though, but now it seems just like she would come back," and turning her face more fully toward him, Alice told him how she had loved the lost one, and how each day she prayed that she might come home to them again. "I don't know as she was pretty," she said, "but she was so sweet, so good, and I'm so lonesome without her," and down Alice's cheeks the big tears rolled, while Ben's kept company with them and fell on her hands.

"Man, don't you cry a heap?" she asked, shaking the round drops off and wondering why a perfect stranger should care so much for Marian.

"I'm so plaguy tender-hearted that I can't help it," was Ben's apology, as he blew his nose vigorously upon his blue cotton handkerchief.

For a time longer he talked with her, treasuring up blessed words of comfort for the distant Marian, and learning also

that Alice was sure Frederic would never marry again until certain of Marian's death. He might like Isabel, she admitted, but he would not dare make her his wife till he knew for true what had become of Marian.

"And he does know it, the scented-up puppy," thought Ben. "He jest writ her that last insultin' thing to kill her out and out; but he didn't come it, and till he knows he did, he dassent do nothin'."

Ben then went down to the kitchen where he got into friendly conversation with Dinah.

"That little gal, Alice, has been telling me about Mr. Raymond's marriage. Unlucky, wasn't he? Shouldn't wonder though, if he had kind of a hankerin' after that black-eyed miss. She's han'some as a picter."

Dinah needed but this to loosen her tongue. She had long before made up her mind that "Isabel was no kind o' 'count"; and once the two had come to open hostilities, Isabel accusing Dinah of being a "lazy, gossiping nigger," while Dinah, in return, had told her "she warn't no better'n she should be, stickin' 'round after Marster Frederic, when nobody knew whether Miss Marian was dead, or not."

This indignity was reported to Frederic, who reproved old Dinah sharply; whereupon, she turned toward him, to use her favorite expression, "gin him a piece of her mind."

After this it was generally understood that between Dinah and Isabel there existed no very amicable state of feeling, and when Ben spoke of the latter, the former exploded at once.

"'Twas a burnin' shame," she said, "and it mortified her een-a-most to death to see the trollop a tryin' to set to marster, when nobody know'd for sartin if his fust wife was dead."

"Marster's jest as fast as she," interposed Hetty, who seldom agreed with Dinah.

A contemptuous sneer curled Dinah's lip as she said to Ben, in a whisper:

"Don't b'lieve none o' her trash. Them Higginses allus would lie. I hain't never seen Marster Frederic do a single thing out o' the way, 'cept to look at her, jest as Phil used to look at me when he was sparkin'. I don't think that was very 'spectable in him, to be sure, but looks don't signify. He dassent marry her till he knows for sartin t'other one is dead. He done told Alice so, and she told me"; and then Dinah launched out into praises of the lost Marian, exalting her so highly that Ben tossed into her lap a pair of earrings which she had greatly admired.

"Take them," said he, "for standin' up for that poor run-

away. I like to hear one woman stick to another."

Dinah cast an exulting glance at Hetty, who, nothing daunted, came forward and said:

"Miss Marian was as likely a gal as thar was in Kentuck, and she, for one, should be as glad to see her back as some o' them that made sich a fuss about it."

"Playin' 'possum," whispered Dinah. "Them Higginses is up to that."

Ben probably thought so, too, for he paid no attention to Hetty, who, highly indignant, started for Isabel, and told her "how Dinah and that fetch-ed peddler done spilt her character entirely."

"Leave the room," was Isabel's haughty answer. "I am above what a poor negro and an ignorant Yankee can say."

"For the dear Lord's sake," muttered the discomfited Hetty; "wonder if she ain't a Yankee her own self. 'Spects how she done forgot whar she was raised," and Hetty returned to the kitchen a warmer adherent of Marian than Dinah had ever been.

She, too, was very talkative now, and before nine o'clock Ben had learned all that he expected to learn, and much more. He had ascertained that no one had the slightest suspicion of the reason why Marian went away; that both Frederic and Isabel seemed unhappy; that Dinah and Hetty, too, believed "thar was somethin' warin' on thar minds"; that Frederic was discontented and talked seriously of leaving Redstone Hall in the care of an overseer, and moving, in the autumn, to his residence on the Hudson; that Hetty hoped he would, and Dinah hoped he wouldn't—" 'case if he did, it would be next to impossible to get a stroke o' work out o' them lazy Higginses."

"I've got all I come for, I b'lieve," was Ben's mental comment, as he left the kitchen and returned to the dining room, where he found Frederic alone. "I'll poke his ribs a little," he thought, and, helping himself to a chair, he began:

"Wall, square, I've been out seein' your niggers. Got a fine lot on 'em, and I shouldn't wonder if you was wo'th considerable. Willed to you by your dad, or was it a kind of a dowry come by your wife? You're a widower, they say"; and the gray eyes looked out at their corners, as Ben thought, "That 'll make him squirm, I guess."

Frederic turned very white, but his voice was natural as he replied:

"My father was called the richest man in the county, and I was his only child."

"Ah, yes, come to you that way," answered Ben, continuing

after a moment: "There's a big house up on the Hudson—to Yonkers—that's been shet up and rented at odd spells for a good while, and somebody told me it belonged to a Col. Raymond, who lived South. Mebby that's yourn?"

"It is," returned Frederic, "and I expect now to go there in the fall."

"I want to know. I shouldn't s'pose you could be hired to leave this place."

"I couldn't be hired to stay. There are too many sad memories connected with it," was Frederic's answer, and he paced the floor hurriedly, while Ben continued: "Mebby you'll be takin' a new wife there?"

Frederic's cheek flushed, as he replied:

"If I ever marry again, it will not be in years. Would you like to go to bed, sir?"

Ben took the hint, and replying, "I don't care if I dew," followed the negro, who came at Frederic's call, up to his room, a pleasant, comfortable chamber, overlooking the river and the surrounding country.

"Golly, this is grand!" said Ben, examining the different articles of furniture, as if he had never seen anything like it before.

The negro, who was Lyd's husband, made no reply; but hurrying downstairs to his mother-in-law, he told her: "Thar was somethin' mighty queer about that man, and if they all found themselves alive in the mornin', he should be thankful."

The morning dawned at last, and, with her fears abated, Dinah washed the silver, made the coffee, broiled the steak, and fried the cornmeal batter cakes, which last were at first respectfully declined by Ben, who admitted that they "might be fust-rate, but he didn't b'lieve they'd set well on his stomach."

Hetty, who was waiting upon the table, quickly divined the reason, and whispered to him, "Lord bless you, take some; I done sifted the meal!"

This argument was conclusive, and helping himself to the light, steaming cakes, Ben thought, "I may as well eat 'em, for tain't no wuss, nor as bad, as them Irish gals does to hum, only I happened to see it!"

Breakfast being over, he offered to settle his bill, which he found was nothing.

"Now, ra'ally, square," he said, as Frederic refused to take pay, "I allus hearn that Kentuckians was mighty free-hearted, but I didn't 'spect you to give me my livin'. I'm much obleeged to you, though, and I shall have more left to eddicate that little sister I was tellin' you 'bout. I mean to give her tiptop larnin'

and mebby sometime she'll come here to teach this wee one," and he laid his hand on Alice's hair.

The little girl smiled up into his face, and said: "Come again and peddle here, won't you?"

"Wouldn't wonder if I turned up amongst you some day," was his answer; and bidding the family good-by, he went out into the yard to Bruno's kennel, for until this minute he had forgotten that the dog was to be remembered.

"Keep away from dar," called Uncle Phil, while Bruno growled savagely and bounded against the bars as if anxious to pounce upon the intruder.

"I've seen enough of him," thought Ben, and shaking hands with Uncle Phil, he walked rapidly down the avenue and out into the highway.

Marian, he knew, was anxious to hear of his success, and not willing to keep her waiting longer than was necessary, he determined to return at once. Accordingly, while the unsuspecting inmates of Redstone Hall were discussing his late visit and singular appearance, he was on his way to the depot, where he took the first train for Frankfort, and was soon sailing down the Kentucky toward home.

CHAPTER X

PLANS

MARIAN was sitting by the window of her little room, looking out into the busy street below, and thinking how differently New York seemed to her now from what it did that dreary day when she wandered down Broadway, and wished that she could die. She had counted the days of Ben's absence, and she knew it was almost time for his return. She did not expect him today, however, and she paid no attention to the heavy footstep upon the stairs, neither did she hear the creaking of the door; but, when Mrs. Burt exclaimed, "Benjamin Franklin! Where did you come from?" she started, and in an instant held both his hands in hers.

Wistfully, eagerly she looked up into his face, longing, yet dreading, to ask the important question.

"Have you been there?" she managed to say, at last; and Ben replied: "Yes, I've been to Redstun Hall, and seen the hull tribe on 'em. That Josh is a case. Couldn't understand him no more than if he spoke a furrin tongue."

"But Frederic—did you see him, and is he—oh, Ben, do tell me—what you know I want to hear?" and Marian trembled with excitement.

"Wall, I will," answered Ben, dropping into a chair, and coming to the point at once. "Frederic ain't married to Isabel, nor ain't a-goin' to be, either."

"What made him write me that lie?" was Marian's next question, asked so mournfully that Ben replied:

"A body 'd 'spose you was sorry it warn't the truth he writ'."

"I am so glad it is not true," returned Marian; "but it hurts me so to lose confidence in one I love. How does Frederic look?"

"White as a sheet and poor as a crow," said Ben. "It's a wearin' on him, depend on't. But she—I tell you she's a dasher, with the blackest eyes and hair I ever seen."

"Who?" fairly screamed Marian. "Who? Not Isabel? Oh, Ben, is Isabel there?" And Marian grew as white as Ben had described Frederic to be.

"Yes, she is," returned Ben. "She's pretendin' to teach that

blind gal, but Frederic ain't makin' love to her—no such thing. So don't go to faintin' away, and I'll begin at the beginnin' and tell you the hull story."

Thus reassured, Marian composed herself and listened, while Ben narrated every particular of his recent visit to Redstone Hall.

Whatever Ben undertook he was sure to accomplish in the shortest possible time, and before starting upon another peddling excursion, the name of "Marian Grey" was enrolled among the list of pupils who attended Madam Harcourt's school. At first she was subject to many annoyances, for, as was quite natural, her companions inquired concerning her standing, and when they learned that her aunt was a sewing woman, and that the queer, awkward fellow who came with her the first day was her cousin and a peddler, they treated her slightingly, and laughed at her plain dress. But Marian did not care. One thought—one feeling alone actuated her, to make herself something of which Frederic Raymond should not be ashamed was her aim, and for this she studied early and late, winning golden laurels in the opinion of her teachers, and coming ere long to be respected and loved by her companions, who little suspected that she was the heiress of untold wealth.

Thus the summer and a part of the autumn passed away, and when the semi-annual examination came, Marian Grey stood first in all her classes, acquitting herself so creditably, and receiving so much praise, that Ben, who chanced to be present, was perfectly overjoyed, and evinced his pleasure by shedding tears, his usual way of expressing feeling.

From this time forward Marian's progress was rapid, until even she herself wondered how it were possible for her to learn so fast when she had formerly cared so little for books. Hope, and a joyful anticipation of what would possibly be hers in the future, kept her up and helped her to endure the mental labors which might otherwise have overtaxed her strength. Gradually, too, the old soreness at her heart wore away, and she recovered, in a measure, her former lightheartedness, until at last her merry laugh was often heard ringing out loud and clear, just as it used to do at home in days gone by. Very anxiously Ben watched her, and when on his return from his excursions he found her, as he always did, improved in looks and spirits, he rubbed his hands together and whispered to himself. "She'll set up for a beauty, yet, and no mistake. That hair of her'n is growin' a splendid color."

Toward the last of November, Ben, who found his peddling profitable, took a trip through Western New York, and did not return until February, when, somewhat to his mother's annoyance, he brought a sick stranger with him. He had taken the cars at Albany, where he met with the stranger, who offered him a part of his seat and made himself so generally agreeable that Ben's susceptible heart warmed toward him at once, and when at last, near New York, the man grew rapidly worse, Ben's sympathy was aroused, and learning that he had no friends in the city, he urged him so strongly to accompany him home for the night, at least, that his invitation was accepted, and the more readily, perhaps, as the stranger's pocket had been picked in Albany, and he had nothing left except his ticket to New York. This reason was not very satisfactory to Mrs. Burt, who from the first had disliked their visitor's appearance. He was a powerfully built young man, with black, bushy hair, and restless, rolling eyes, which seemed ever on the alert to discover something not intended for them to see. His face wore a hard, dissipated look; and when Mrs. Burt saw how soon, after seating himself before the warm fire, he fell asleep, she rightly conjectured that a fit of drunkenness had been the cause of his illness. Still, he was their guest, and she would not treat him uncivilly, so she bade her son take him to his room, where he lay in the same deep, stupid sleep, breathing so loudly that he could be plainly heard in the adjoining room, where Marian and Ben were talking of the house at Yonkers which was not finished yet, and would not be ready for the family until some time in May.

Suddenly the loud breathing in the bedroom ceased—the stranger was waking up; but Ben and Marian paid no heed, and talked on freely as if there were no greedy ears drinking in each word they said—no wild-eyed man leaning on his elbow and putting together, link by link, the chain of mystery until it was as clear to him as noonday. The first sentence which he heard distinctly sobered him at once. It was Marian who spoke, and the words she said were: "I wonder if Isabel Huntington will come with Frederic to Yonkers."

"Isabel!" the stranger gasped. "What do they know of her?" And sitting up in bed, he listened until he learned what they knew of her, and learned, too, that the young girl whom Ben Burt called his cousin was the runaway bride from Redstone Hall.

Fiercely the black eyes flashed through the darkness, and the fists smote angrily together as the stranger hoarsely whispered:

"The time I've waited for has come at last, and the proud shall be humbled in the very dust!"

It was Rudolph McVicar who thus threatened evil to Isabel Huntington. He had loved her once, but her scornful refusal of him, even after she was his promised wife, had turned his love to hate, and he had sworn to avenge the wrong should a good chance ever occur. He knew that she was in Kentucky —a teacher at Redstone Hall—and for a time he had expected to hear of her marriage with the heir, but this intelligence did not come, and weary of New Haven, he at last made a trip to New Orleans, determining on his way back to stop for a time in the neighborhood of Redstone Hall, and if possible learn the reason why Isabel had not yet succeeded in securing Frederic Raymond. On the boat in which he took passage on his return were three of four young people from Franklin County, and among them Agnes Gibson and her brother. They were a very merry party, and at once attracted the attention of Rudolph, who, learning that they were from the vicinity of Frankfort, hovered around them, hoping that by some chance he might hear them speak of Isabel. Nor was he disappointed; for one afternoon when they were assembled upon the upper deck, one of their number who lived in Lexington, and who had been absent in California for nearly two years, inquired after Frederic Raymond, whom he had formerly met at school.

"Why," returned the loquacious Agnes, "did no one write that news to you?" and oblivious entirely of Rudolph McVicar, who at a little distance was listening attentively, she told the story of Frederic's strange marriage and its sad denouement. Isabel, too, was freely discussed, Miss Agnes saying that Mr. Raymond would undoubtedly marry her, could he know that Marian was dead, but as there was some who entertained doubts upon that point he would hardly dare to take any decisive step until uncertainty was made sure.

"When Miss Huntington first came to Redstone Hall," continued Agnes, "she took no pains whatever to conceal her preference for Mr. Raymond; but latterly a change has come over her, and she hardly appears like the same girl. There seems to be something on her mind, though what it is I have never been able to learn, which is a little strange, considering that she tells me everything."

Not a word of all this story was lost by McVicar. There was no reason now for his leaving the boat at Louisville. He knew why Isabel was not a bride, and secretly exulting as he thought of her weary restlessness, he kept on his way till he

reached Albany, where a debauch of a few days was succeeded by the sickness which had awakened the sympathy of the tender-hearted Ben, and induced the latter to offer him shelter for the night. He was glad of it now—glad that he had been drunk and met with Ben, for by that means he had discovered the hiding place of Frederic Raymond's wife. He did not know of her fortune, but he knew that she was Marian Lindsey; that accidentally, as he supposed, she had stumbled upon Mrs. Burt and Ben, who were keeping her secret from the world, and that was enough for him. That Isabel had something to do with her he was sure, and long after the conversation in the next room had ceased, he lay awake thinking what use he should make of his knowledge, and still not betray those who had befriended him.

Rudolph McVicar was an adept in cunning, and before the morning dawned he had formed a plan by which he hoped to crush the haughty Isabel. Assuming an air of indifference to everything around him, he sauntered out to breakfast and pretended to eat, while his eyes rested almost constantly on Marian. She was very young, he thought, and far prettier than Agnes Gibson had represented her to be. She was changing in her looks, he said, and two or three years would ripen her into a beautiful woman of whom Frederic Raymond would be proud. Much he wished he knew why she had left Redstone Hall, but as this knowledge was beyond his reach, he contented himself with knowing who she was, and after breakfast was over, he thanked his new acquaintances for their hospitality, and went out into the city, going first to a pawnbroker's, where he left his watch, receiving in exchange money enough to defray his expenses in the city for several days.

That night in a private room at the St. Nicholas, he sat alone, bending over a letter, which, when finished, bore a very fair resemblance to an uneducated woman's handwriting, and which read as follows:

"M. Raymond: I now take my pen in hand to inform you that A young Woman, calling herself Marian lindsey has ben staying with me awhile And she said you was her Husband what she came of and left you for I dont know and I spose its none of my Bizness all I have to do is to tell you that she died wun week ago come sunday with the canker-rash and she made me Promise to rite and tell you she was ded and that she forgives you all your Sins and hope you wouldn't wate long before you marred agen it would of done your Hart good to heard her tauk like a Sante as she did. i should of writ

sooner only her sicnes hindered me about gettin reddy for a journey ime goin to take my only Brother lives in scotland and ime goin out to live with him i was most reddy when Marian took sick if she had lived she was comin back to you I beleave and now that shes ded ime goin rite of in the ——— which sales tomorrough nite else ide ask you to come down and see where she died and all about it. i made her as comfitable as I could and hoping you wouldn't take it to hard for Deth is the lot of all i am your most Humble Servant

"SARAH GREEN."

"There," soliloquized Rudolph, reading over the letter. "That covers the whole ground, and still gives him no clew in case he should come to New York. The ——— does sail the very day I have named, and though 'Sarah Green' may not be among her passengers, it answers my purpose quite as well. I believe I've steered clear of all doubtful points which might lead him to suspect a forgery. He knows Marian would not attempt to deceive him thus, and he will, undoubtedly, think old Mrs. Green some good, pious soul, who dosed the patient with saffron tea, and then saw her decently interred! He'll have a nice time hunting up her grave if he should undertake that. But he won't—he'll be pleased enough to know that he is free, for by all accounts he didn't love her much, and in less than six weeks he'll be engaged to Isabel. But I'll be on their track. I'll watch them narrowly, and when the day is set, and the guests are there, one will go unbidden to the marriage feast, and the story that uninvited guest can tell will humble the proud beauty to the dust. He will tell her that this letter was a forgery, and Sarah Green a myth; that Marian Lindsey lives, and Frederic Raymond, if he takes another wife, can be indicted for bigamy; and when he sees her eyes flash fire, and her cheek grow pale with rage and disappointment, Rudolph McVicar will be avenged."

This, then, was the plan which Rudolph had formed, and, without wavering for an instant in his purpose, he sealed the letter, and, directing it to Frederic, sent it on its way, going himself the next morning to New Haven, where he had some money deposited in the bank. This he withdrew, and after a few days started for Lexington, where he intended to remain, and watch the proceedings at Redstone Hall, until the denouement of his plot.

CHAPTER XI

THE EFFECT

Not quite one year has passed away since the warm spring night when Ben Burt first strolled leisurely up the long avenue leading to Redstone Hall. It was April then, and the early flowers were in bloom, but now the chill March winds are blowing, and the brown stocks of the tall rosetree brush against the window, from which a single light streams out into the darkness. It is the window of the little library where we have seen Frederic before, and where we meet him once again. He has changed somewhat since we saw him last, and there is upon his face a sad, thoughtful expression, as if far down in his heart there were a haunting memory which would follow him through all time, and embitter every hour.

One year and more of the dreary seven was gone, but the future looked almost hopeless to Isabel, and she was sometimes tempted to go away and leave the dangerous game at which she was so hazardously playing. Still, when she seriously contemplated such a proceeding, she shrank from it —for, even though she were never Frederic's wife, she would rather remain where she was, and see that no other came to dispute the little claim she had. All her old assurance was gone, and in her dread lest Frederic should say the words she must not hear, she assumed toward him a half-distant, half-bashful manner, far more attractive than a bolder course of conduct would have been, and Frederic, while watching her in this new phase of character, struggled manfully against the feeling which sometimes prompted him to break his promise to the blind girl. She was faulty, he knew—far more so than he had once imagined—but she was brilliant, beautiful, accomplished, and he thought that he loved her.

But not of her was he thinking that chill March night when he sat alone in the library watching the flickering of the lamp, and listening to the evening wind, as it shook the bushes beneath his window. It was Marian's seventeenth birthday, and he was thinking of her, wondering what she would have been had she lived to see this day. She was surely dead, he thought, or some tidings of her would have come to him ere this, and when he remembered how gentle, how pure and self-denying

her short life had been, he said involuntarily: "Poor Marian —she deserved a better fate, and should she come back to me again I would prove to her that I am not all unworthy of her love."

There was a shuffling tread in the hall, and Josh appeared, bringing several letters. One bore the Louisville postmark—one was from New Orleans—one from Lexington, and one from Sarah Green!

"Who writes to me from New York?" was Frederic's mental query, and tearing open the wrapper he drew nearer to him the lamp and read, while there crept over him a nameless terror as if even while he was thinking of the lost, the grave had opened at his feet and shown him where she lay; not in the moaning river—not in the deep, dark woods, nor on the western prairies, as he had sometimes feared, but far away in the great city, where there was no one to pity—no eye to weep for her save that of the rude woman who had written him the letter.

There Marian had suffered and died for him. His Marian —his young girl-wife! He could call her so now, and he did, saying it softly, reverently, as we speak always of the departed, while the tears he was not ashamed to weep dropped upon the soiled sheet. He did not think of doubting it. There was no reason why he should, and his heart went out after the dead as it had never gone after the living. It seemed to him so terrible that she should die among strangers, so far from home; and he wondered much how she ever chanced to get there. She had remembered him to the last, "forgiving all his sins," the woman said, and knowing well how much those few words meant, he said again, "Poor Marian," just as the door opened and Alice came slowly in.

There was a grand party that night at the house of Lawyer Gibson, and at Isabel's request Alice had come to ask how long before the carriage would be ready. Dinah had told her that Frederic was in the library, but he sat so still she thought he was not there, and she said inquiringly: "Frederic?"

"Yes, darling," was his answer, in a tone which startled the sensitive child, for she detected in it a sound of tears, and hurrying to his side she passed her hand over his face to assure herself that she heard aright.

"Has something dreadful happened?" she asked, as she felt the moisture on his eyelids.

Taking her on his lap, and laying his burning cheek against her cool forehead, Frederic said to her very tenderly and low:

"Alice, poor Marian is dead! Here is the letter which came

to tell us," and he placed it in her hand. There was a sudden upward flashing of the brown eyes, and then their soft light was quenched in tears, as, burying her face in the young man's bosom, the blind girl sobbed: "Oh, no, no, Frederic, no."

For several minutes she wept passionately, while her little frame shook with strong emotion. Then, lifting up her head and reaching toward the spot where she knew the letter lay, she said:

"Read it to me, Frederic," and he did read, pausing occasionally as he was interrupted by her low moaning cry.

"Is that all?" she asked, when he had finished. "Didn't you leave out a word?"

"Not one," was his reply, and with quivering lips the heart-broken child continued, "Marian sent no message for poor blind Alice to remember—she never thought of me who loved her so much. Why didn't she, Frederic?" and the sightless eyes looked beseechingly at him as if he could explain the mystery.

Poor child! Rudolph McVicar did not know how strong was the affection between those two young girls, or he would surely have sent a message to one who seemed almost a part of Marian herself, and it was this very omission which finally led the close-reasoning child to doubt the truth of the letter. But she did not doubt it now. Marian was really dead to her, and for a long time she sat with Frederic, saying nothing, but by her silence manifesting to him how great was her grief at this certain bereavement.

At last, remembering her errand, she told him why she had come, and asked what she should say to Isabel.

"Tell her I shall not go," he said, "but she need not remain at home for that. The carriage can be ready at any time, and, Alice, will you tell her the rest? You'll do it better than I."

Alice would rather that someone else should carry to Isabel tidings which she felt intuitively would be received with more pleasure than pain, but if Frederic requested it of her she would do it, and she started to return. To her the night and the day were the same, and ordinarily it mattered not whether there were lamps in the hall or not, but now, as she passed from the library into the adjoining room, there came over her a feeling of such utter loneliness and desolation that she turned back and said to Frederic:

"Will you go with me up the stairs, for now that Marian is dead, the night is darker than it ever was before."

He appreciated her feelings, and taking her by the hand, led

her to the door of Isabel's room. Very impatiently Isabel had waited for her, wishing to know what hour Frederic intended starting, and if there would be time for Luce, her waiting maid, to curl her long, black hair. Accidentally she had overheard a gentleman say that if she wore curls she would be the most beautiful woman in Kentucky, and as he was to be present at the party she determined to prove his assertion.

"I hope that young one stays well," she said angrily, as the moments went by, and at last, as Alice did not come, she bade Luce put the iron in the fire and commence her operations.

The negress accordingly obeyed the orders, and six long curls were streaming down the lady's back, while a seventh was wound around the hissing iron in close proximity to her ear, when Alice came in, and hurrying up to her side, began:

"Oh, Miss Huntington, poor, dear Marian wasn't dead all the time they thought she was. She was in New York, with Mrs. ———"

She did not finish the sentence; for, feeling certain that her treachery was about to be disclosed, the guilty Isabel jumped so suddenly as to bring the hot iron directly across her ear and a portion of her forehead. Maddened with the pain, and a dread of impending disgrace, she struck the innocent girl a blow which sent her reeling across the floor.

"Oh, Lordy!" exclaimed Luce, untwisting the hair so rapidly that a portion of it was torn from the head; "Oh, Lordy! Miss Isabel, Alice never tached you"; and, throwing the iron upon the hearth, she hurried to the prostrate child, who had thrown herself upon the lounge and was sobbing so loud and hysterically that Isabel herself was alarmed, and while bathing her blistered ear, tried to stammer out some apology for what she had done.

"I supposed you carelessly ran against me," she said; "and it hurt me so I didn't know what I was doing. Pray, don't cry that way. You'll raise the house"; and she took hold of Alice's shoulder.

"I wish she would," muttered Luce; and, stooping down, she whispered: "Screech louder, so as to fotch Marster Frederic, and tell him jest how she done sarved you!"

But nothing could be further from Alice's mind than crying for effect. It was not so much the indignity she had suffered, nor yet the pain of the blow which made her weep so bitterly. It was rather the utter sense of desolation, the feeling that her last hope had drifted away with the certainty of Marian's death, and for a time she wept on passionately; while Isabel, with a hurricane in her bosom, walked the floor, wondering if

her perfidy would ever be discovered, and feeling that she cared but little now whether it were or not. Suspense was terrible, and when the violence of Alice's sobs had subsided, she said to her:

"Where is Marian, and when is she coming home?"

"Oh, never, never!" answered the child. "She can't come back, for she's dead now, Marian is"; and Alice covered her face again with her hands.

"Dead!" exclaimed Isabel, in a far different voice from that in which she had spoken before. "What do you mean?" and passing her arm very caressingly around the little figure lying on the lounge, she continued: "I am sorry I struck you, Alice. I didn't know what I was doing, and you must forgive me, will you, darling? There, dry your eyes, and tell me all about poor Marian. When did she die, and where?"

As well as she could for her tears, Alice told what she knew, and satisfied that she was in no way implicated, Isabel became still more amiable, even speaking pleasantly to Luce and telling her she might do as she pleased the remainder of the evening.

"Of course I shouldn't think of attending the party now, even if I were not so dreadfully burned. Poor Frederic! How badly he must feel!"

"He does," said Alice, "and he cried, too."

Isabel curled her proud lip contemptuously, and dipping her handkerchief again in the water, she applied it to her blistered ear, thinking to herself that he would probably be easily consoled. It would be proper, too, for her to commence the consoling process at once, by expressing her sympathy; and leaving Alice alone she went to the library where Frederic was still sitting, so absorbed in his own sad reflections that he did not observe her approach until she said: "Alice tells me you have heard from Marian," then he started suddenly, and turning toward her, answered: "Yes, you can read what is written here if you like," and he passed her McVicar's letter.

It did seem to Isabel that there was something familiar about the writing, particularly in the formation of the capitals, but she suspected no fraud and accepted the whole as coming from Sarah Green.

"This is some new acquaintance Marian picked up," she thought. "The woman speaks of having known her but a short time. Probably she left Mrs. Daniel Burt and stumbled upon Sarah Green," and with an exultant smile upon her beautiful face, she put the letter down, and laying her hand very lightly on Frederic's shoulder, said: "I am sorry for you,

Frederic, though it is better, of course, to know just what did become of the poor girl."

Frederic could not tell why it was that Isabel's words of sympathy grated harshly on his ear. He only knew that they did, and he was glad when she left him alone, telling him she should not, of course, attend the party, and saying in reply to his questions as to what ailed her ear, that Luce, who was curling her hair, carelessly burned it.

"By the way," she continued, "when I felt the hot iron, I jumped, and throwing out my hand, accidentally hit Alice on her head and, if you'll believe me, the sensitive child thinks I intended it, and has almost cried herself sick."

This falsehood she deemed necessary, in case the truth of the matter should ever reach Frederic through another channel, and feeling confident that she was safe in every respect, and that the prize she so much coveted was nearly won. she left him and sought her mother's chamber.

To Frederic reality was more endurable than suspense, for he could look the future in the face and think what he would do. He was free to marry Isabel, he believed; but, as was quite natural, he cared less about it now than when there was an obstacle in his way. There was no danger of losing her, he was sure, and he could wait as long as he pleased! Once he thought of going to New York to make some inquiries, and, if possible, find Marian's grave, but when he reflected that Sarah Green was on the ocean, even before her letter reached Kentucky, he decided to defer the matter until their removal to Yonkers, which was to take place about the middle of May. Isabel, too, had her own views upon the subject. There no longer existed a reason why Frederic should not address her, and in her estimation nothing could be more proper than to christen the new home with a bride. So she bent all her energies to the task, smiling her sweetest smile, saying her softest words, and playing the amiable lady to perfection. But it availed her nothing, and she determined at last upon a bolder movement.

Finding Frederic alone in the parlor one day, she said:

"I suppose it will not affect you materially if mother and I leave when you remove to Yonkers. Agnes Gibson, you know, is soon to be married, and she has invited me to go with her to Florida, where, she says, I can procure a good situation as music teacher, and mother wishes to go back to New Haven."

The announcement, and the coolness with which it was made, startled Frederic, and he replied, rather anxiously:

"I have never contemplated a separation. I shall need your

mother there more than I do here, for I shall not have Dinah."

"Perhaps you can persuade her to stay, but I think it best for me to go," returned Isabel, delighted with her success.

Frederic Raymond did not wish Isabel to leave him, and after a moment, he said:

"Why must you go, Isabel? Do you wish for a larger salary? Are you tired of us—of me?" And the last words were spoken hesitatingly, as if he doubted the propriety of his saying them.

"Oh, Frederic!" and in the soft black eyes raised for an instant to his face, and then modestly withdrawn, there was certainly a tear! "Oh, Frederic!" was all she said, and Frederic felt constrained to answer: "What is it, Isabel? Why do you wish to go?"

"I don't—I don't," she answered passionately; "but respect for myself demands it. People are already talking about my living here with you; and now poor Marian is dead and you are a widower, it will be tenfold worse. I wish they would let us alone, for I have been so happy here and am so much attached to Alice. It will almost break my heart to leave her!"

Isabel Huntington was wondrously beautiful then, and Frederic Raymond was sorely tempted to bid her stay, not as Alice's governess, nor yet as the daughter of his housekeeper, but as his wife and mistress of his house. Several times he tried to speak, and at last, crossing over to where she sat, he began: "Isabel, I have never heard that people were talking of you; there is no reason why they should, but if they are I can devise a method of stopping it, and still keeping you with us. I have never spoken to you of ———" love, he was going to say, and the graceful head was already bent to catch the sound, when a little voice chimed in, "Please, Frederic, I am here," and looking up they saw before them Alice.

She had entered unobserved and was standing just within the door, where she heard what Frederic said. Intuitively she felt what would follow next, and scarcely knowing what she did, she had apprised them of her presence.

"The brat!" was Isabel's mental comment, while Frederic was sensible of a feeling of relief, as if he had suddenly awakened from a spell, or been saved from some great peril. For several moments Isabel sat, hoping Alice would leave the room, but she did not, and in no very amiable mood the lady herself constrained to go, by a call from her mother, who wished to see her on some trivial matter.

When she was gone, Alice groped her way to the sofa, and

climging upon it said to Frederic: "Won't you read me that letter again which Mrs. Green wrote to you?"

He complied with her request, and when he had finished the child continued: "If Marian had really died, wouldn't she have sent some message to me, and wouldn't that woman have told us how she happened to be way off there, and all about it?"

"If Marian really died!" repeated Frederic. "Do you doubt it?"

"Yes," returned the child, "Marian loved me most as well as she did you, and she surely would have talked of me and sent me some word; then, too, is there much difference between scarlet fever and canker-rash? Don't some folks call it by both names?"

"I believe they do," said Frederic, wondering to what all this was tending.

"Marian had the scarlet fever, and I, too, just after I came here," was Alice's next remark. "You were at college, but I remember it, and so does Dinah, for I asked her a little while ago. Can folks have it twice?" and the little blind eyes looked up at Frederic, as if sure that this last argument at least were proof conclusive of Marian's existence.

"Sometimes, but not often," answered Frederic, the shadow of doubt creeping into his own mind.

"And if they do," persisted Alice, who had been consulting with Dinah, "if they do, they seldom have it hard enough to die, so Dinah says; and I don't believe that was a good, true letter. Somebody wrote it to be wicked. Marian is alive, I almost know."

"Must you see her dead body, to be convinced?" asked Frederic a little impatiently; and Alice rejoined:

"No, no; but somehow it don't seem right for you—to—oh, Frederic!" and, bursting into tears, she came at once to the root of the whole matter.

She had thought a great deal about the letter, wondering why Marian had failed to speak of her, and at last rejecting it as an impossibility. Suddenly, too, she remembered that once, when she and Marian were sick, she heard some of the neighbors speak of their disease as scarlet fever, while others called it the canker-rash; and all united in saying they could have it but once. This had led to inquiries of Dinah, and had finally resulted in her conviction that Marian might possibly be living. Full of this new idea, she had hastened to Frederic, and accidentally overheard what he was saying to Isabel. She comprehended it, too, and knew that but for her unexpected

presence, he would, perhaps, have asked the lady to be his wife, and she felt again as if Marian were there urging her to stand once more between Frederic and temptation. All this she told him, and the proud, haughty man, who would have spurned a like interference from any other source, listened patiently to the pleadings of the childish voice, which said to him so earnestly:

"Don't let Isabel be your wife!"

"What objection have you to her?" he asked; and when she replied, "She isn't good," he questioned her further as to the cause of her dislike; "was there really a reason, or was it mere prejudice?"

"I try to like her," said Alice, "and sometimes I do real well, but she don't act alone with me like she does when you are around. She'll be just as cross as fury, and if you come in, she'll smooth my hair and call me 'little pet.'"

"Does she ever strike you?" asked Frederic, feeling a desire to hear Alice's version of that story.

Instantly the tears came into Alice's eyes, and she replied: "Only once—and she said she did not mean that—but, Frederic, she did," and in her own way Alice told the story, which sounded to Mr. Raymond more like the truth than the one he had heard from Isabel. Gradually the conviction was forcing itself upon him that Isabel was not exactly what she seemed. Still, he could not suddenly shake off the chain which bound him, and when Alice said to him in her odd, straightforward way: "Don't finish what you were saying to Isabel until you've been to New York and found if the letter is true." He answered, "Fie, Alice, you are unreasonable to ask such a thing of me. Marian is dead. I have no doubt of it, and I am free from the promise made to you more than a year since."

"Maybe she isn't," was Alice's reply, "and if she is, we shall both feel better if you go and see. Go, Frederic, do. It won't take long, and if you find she is really dead, I'll never speak another naughty word of Isabel, but try to love her just as I want to love your wife. Will you go, Frederic? I heard you say you ought to see the house before we moved, and Yonkers is close to New York, isn't it?"

This last argument was more convincing than any which Alice had offered, for Frederic had left the entire management of repairs to one whom he knew understood such matters better than himself, consequently he had not been there at all, and he had several times spoken of going up to see that all was right. Particularly would he wish to do this if he took

hither a bride in May, and to Alice's suggestion he replied: "I might, perhaps, do that for the sake of gratifying you."

"Oh, if you only would!" answered Alice. "You'll find her somewhere—I know you will—and then you'll be glad you went."

Frederic was not quite so sure of that, but it was safe to go, and while Isabel had been communicating to her mother what he had been saying to her, and asking if it were not almost a proposal, he was deciding to start for New York immediately. Alice's reasons for doubting the authenticity of the letter seemed more and more plausible the longer he thought of them, and at supper that night he astonished both Mrs. Huntington and her daughter by saying that he was going North in a few days, and wished the former to see that his wardrobe was in proper condition for traveling. Isabel's face grew dark as night, and the wrathful expression of her eyes was noticeable even to him. "There is a good deal of temper there," was his mental comment, while Isabel feigned some trivial excuse and left the room to hide the anger she knew was visible upon her face. He had commenced proposing to her, she was sure, and he should not leave Redstone Hall until he explained himself more fully. Still, it would not be proper for her to broach the subject—her mother must do do that. It was a parent's duty to see that her daughter's feelings were not trifled with, and by dint of cajolery, entreaties and threats, she induced the old lady to have a talk with Frederic, and ask him what his intentions were.

Mrs. Huntington was not very lucid in her remarks, and without exactly knowing what she meant, Frederic replied at random that he was in earnest in all he had said to Isabel about her remaining there, that he did not wish her to go away, for she seemed one of the family, and that he would speak with her further upon the subject when he came back. This was not very definite, but Mrs. Huntington brushed it up a little ere repeating it to Isabel, who really accepted it as an intimation that after his return he intended asking her directly to be his wife. Accordingly she told Agnes Gibson confidentially what her expectations were, and Agnes told it confidentially to several others, who had each a confidential friend, and so in course of a few days it was generally understood that Redstone Hall was to have another mistress. Agnes in particular was very busy disseminating news, hoping by this means to turn the public gossip from herself and the white-haired man, or rather the plantation in Florida, which she was soon to marry. In spite of her protestations to the

contrary, people would say that money and not love actuated her choice, and she was glad of anything which would give her a little rest. So she repeated Isabel's story again and again, charging each and every one never to mention it, and consulting between times with her bosom friend as to what arrangements were made, and suggesting that they be married on the same day and so make the same tour.

The story finally reached the hotel where Rudolph McVicar was a boarder. Exultingly his wild eyes flashed, and when he heard as he did that the wedding was fixed for the twentieth of May, which he knew was Isabel's birthday, he counted the hours which must elapse ere the moment of his triumph came. And while he waited thus, and Rumor, with her lying tongue, told each day some fresh falsehood of "that marriage in high life," Frederic Raymond went on his way, and with each milestone passed drew nearer and nearer to the lost one—the Marian who would stand between him and Isabel.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOUSE ON THE RIVER

"MARIAN," said Ben, one pleasant April morning, "Frederic's house is finished in tiptop style, and if you say so, we'll go out and take a look. It will do you good to see the old place once more and know just how things are fixed."

"Oh, I'd like it so much," returned Marian, "but what if I should stumble upon Frederic?"

"No danger," answered Ben; "the man who has charge of everything told me he wasn't comin' till May, and the old woman who is tendin' to things knows I have seen Mr. Raymond, for I told her so, and she won't think nothin'; so clap on your things in a jiff, for we've barely time to reach the cars."

Marian did not hesitate long ere deciding to go, and in a few moments they were in the street. As they were passing the ——— Hotel, Ben suddenly left her and, running up the steps, spoke to one of the servants with whom he was acquainted. Returning ere long he said, by way of an apology: "I was in there last night to see Jim, and he told me there was a man took sick there with a ravin' fever, pretty much like what you had when you bit your tongue 'most in two."

Marian shuddered involuntarily, and without knowing why, felt a deep interest in the stranger, thinking how terrible it was to be sick and alone in a crowded, noisy hotel.

"Is he better?" she asked, and Ben replied: "No, ten times wuss—he'll die, most likely. But hurry up—here's the omnibus we want," and in the excitement of securing a seat, they both forgot the sick man.

The trip to Yonkers was a pleasant one, for to Marian it seemed like going home, and when, after reaching the station, they entered the lumbering stage and wound slowly up the long, steep hill, she recognized many familiar waymarks, and drawing her veil over her face, wept silently as she remembered all she had passed through since the night when Col. Raymond first took her up that same long hill, and told her by the way of his boy, Frederic, who would be delighted with a sister. The fond old man was dead now, and she, the little girl he had loved so much, was a sad, lonely woman, going

back to visit the spot which had been so handsomely fitted up without a thought of her.

The house itself was greatly changed, but the view it commanded of the river and the scenery beyond was the same, and leaning against a pillar, Marian tried to fancy that she was a child again and listening for the bold footsteps of the handsome, teasing boy, who had been at once her terror and her pride. But all in vain she listened; the well-remembered footfall did not come; the handsome boy was not there, and even had he been, she would scarcely have recognized him in the haughty, elegant young man, her husband. Yes, he was her husband, and she repeated the name to herself, and when at last Ben touched her on her shoulder, saying: "I've told Miss Russell my sister was here, and she says you can go over the house," she started as if waking from a dream.

"Let us go through the garden first," she said, as she led the way to the maple tree where summers before she had built her little playhouse, and where on the bark, just as high up as his head then came, the name of Frederic was cut.

Far below it, and at a point which her red curls had reached, there was another name—her own—and Frederic's jackknife had made that, too, while she stood by and said to him: "I wish I was Marian Raymond, instead of Marian Lindsey."

How distinctly she remembered his characteristic reply:

"If you should happen to be my wife, you would be Marian Raymond; but, pshaw, I shall marry a great deal prettier woman than you will ever be, and you may live with us if you want to, and take care of the children. I mean to have a lot!"

She had not thought of this speech in years, but it came back to her vividly now, as did many other things which had occurred there long ago. Within the house everything was changed, but they had no trouble in identifying the different rooms, and she lingered long in the one she felt sure was intended for Frederic himself, sitting in the chair where she knew he would often sit, and wondering if, while sitting there, he would ever think of her. Perhaps he might be afraid of meeting her accidentally in New York, and so he would seldom come there; or, if he did, it would be after dark, or when she was not in the street, and thus she should possibly never see him, as she hoped to do. The thought was a sad one, and never before had the gulf between herself and Frederic seemed so utterly impassable as on that April morning when, in his room and his armchair, the girl-wife sat and questioned the dark future of what it had in store for her.

Once she was half tempted to leave some memento—something which would tell him she had been there. But she spurned the idea as soon as formed. She would not intrude herself upon him a second time, and rising at last, she arranged the furniture more to her taste, changed the position of a picture, moved the mirror into a perfect angle, set Frederic's chair before the window looking out upon the river and then, standing in the door, fancied that she saw him, with his handsome face turned to the light, and his rich brown hair shading his white brow. At his feet, and not very far away, was a little stool, and if she could only sit there once, resting her head upon his knee and hear him speaking to her kindly, affectionately, she felt that she would gladly die, and leave to another the caresses she could never hope to receive.

Isabel's chamber was visited next, and Marian's would have been less than a woman's nature could she have looked without a pang upon the costly furniture and rare ornaments which had been gathered here. In the disposal of the furniture there was a lack of taste—a decidedly Mrs. Russell air; but Marian had no wish to interfere. There was something sickening in the very atmosphere of her rival's apartment, and with a long, deep sigh, she turned away. Opening the door of an adjoining chamber, she stood for a moment motionless, while her lips moved nervously, for she knew this was Alice's room. It was smaller than the others, and with its neat, white furniture, seemed well adapted to the pure, sinless child who was to occupy it. Here, too, she tarried long, gazing through blinding tears upon the little rocking chair just fitted to Alice's form, looping up the soft lace curtains, brushing the dust from the marble mantel, and patting lovingly the snowy pillows for the sake of the fair head which would rest there some night.

"There are no flowers here," she said, glancing at the tiny vases on the stand. "Alice is fond of flowers, and though they will get withered ere she comes, she will be sure to find them, and who knows but their faint perfume may remind her of me," and going into the garden she gathered some hyacinths and violets which she made into bouquets and placed in the vases, bidding the old woman change the water every day, until they began to fade, and then leave them to dry until the blind girl came. "Ben told me of her; he once stayed at Redstone Hall all night," she said, in answer to the woman's inquiring look. "He says she is a sweet young creature and I thought flowers might please her."

"Fresh ones would," returned Mrs. Russell, "but them that's

withered ain't no use. S'pose I fling 'em away when they get old and put in some new the day she comes?"

"No, no, not for the world; leave them as they are," and Marian spoke so earnestly that the old lady promised compliance with her request.

"Be you that Yankee peddler's sister?" she asked, as she followed Marian down the stairs. "If you be, nater cut up a curis caper with one or t'other of you, for you ain't no more alike than nothin'."

"I believe I do not resemble him much," was Marian's evasive answer, as with a farewell glance at the old place, she bade Mrs. Russell good-by and went with Ben down to the gate where the stage was waiting to take them back to the depot.

It was dark when they reached New York, and as they passed the ——— Hotel a second time, Marian spoke of the sick man, and wondered how he was.

"I might go in and see," said Ben, "but it's so late I guess I won't, particularly as he is nothin' to us."

"But he's something to somebody," returned Marian, and as she followed on after Ben, her thoughts turned continually upon him, wondering if he had a mother—a sister—or a wife, and if they knew how sick he was.

While thus reflecting they reached home, where they found Mrs. Burt entertaining a visitor—a Martha Gibbs, who for some time had been at the ——— Hotel in the capacity of chambermaid, but who was to leave there the next day. Martha's parents lived in the same New England village where Mrs. Burt had formerly resided, and the two had thus become acquainted, Martha making Mrs. Burt the repository of all her little secrets, and receiving in return much motherly advice. She was to be married soon, and though her destination was a log house in the West, and her bridal trousseau consisted merely of three dresses—a silk, a delaine, and a calico—it was an affair of great consequence to her, and she had come as usual to talk it over with Mrs. Burt, feeling glad at the absence of Ben and Marian, the last of whom she supposed was an orphan niece of her friend's husband. The return of the young people operated as a restraint upon her, and changing the conversation, she spoke at last of a sick man who was up in the third story in one of the rooms of which she had the charge.

"He had the typhoid fever," she said, "and was raving distracted with his head. They wanted some good experienced person to take care of him, and had asked her to stay, she

seemed so handy, but she couldn't. John wouldn't put their wedding off, she knew, and she must go, though she did pity the poor young man—he raved and took on so, asking them if anybody had seen Marian, or knew where she was buried!"

Up to this point Marian had listened, because she knew it was the same man of whom Ben had told her in the morning; but now the pulsations of her heart stopped, her head grew dizzy, her brain whirled, and she was conscious of nothing except that Ben made a hurried movement and then passed his arm around her, while he held a cup of water to her lips, sprinkling some upon her face, and saying, in a natural voice: "Don't you want a drink? My walk made me awful dry."

It was dark in the room, for the lamp was not yet lighted, and thus Martha did not see the side play going on. She only knew that Ben was offering Marian some water; but Mrs. Burt understood it, and when sure that Marian would not faint, she said:

"Where did the young man come from, and what is his name? Do you know?"

"He registered himself as F. Raymond, Franklin County, Kentucky," returned the girl; "and that's the bother of it. Nobody knows where to direct a letter to his friends. But how I have stayed! I must go this minute," and greatly to the relief of the family, Martha took her leave.

Scarcely had the door closed after her, when Marian was on her knees and, with her head in Mrs. Burt's lap, was begging of her to offer her services as nurse to Frederic Raymond!

"He must not die there all alone," she cried. "Say you will go, or my heart will burst. They know Martha for a trusty girl, and they will take you on her recommendation. Help me, Ben, to persuade her," she continued, appealing to the young man, who had not yet spoken upon the subject.

He had been thinking of it, however, and as he could see no particular objection, he said at last:

"May as well go, I guess. It won't do no hurt anyway, and mebby it 'll be the means of savin' his life. You can tell Martha how't you 'spose he'll pay a good price for nussin', and she'll think it's the money you are after."

This suggestion was so warmly seconded by Marian, that Mrs. Burt finally consented to seeing Martha, and asking her what she thought of the plan. Accordingly, early the next morning she sought an interview with the young woman, inquiring, first, how the stranger was, and then continuing:

"What do you think of my turning nurse a while and

taking care of him? I am used to such folks, and I presume the gentleman is plenty able to pay."

She had dragged this last in rather bunglingly, but it answered every purpose, for Martha, who knew her thrifty habits, understood at once that money was the inducement, and she replied: "Of course he is. His watch is worth two hundred dollars, to say nothing of a diamond pin. I for one shall be glad to have you come, for I am going away sometime today, and there'll be nobody in particular to take care of him. I'll speak about it right away."

The result of this speaking was that Mrs. Burt's offered services were readily accepted, for Martha was known to be an honest, faithful girl, and anyone whom she recommended must, of course, be respectable and trusty. By some chance, however, there was a misunderstanding about the name, which was first construed into Burton and then into Merton, and as Martha, who alone could rectify the error, left that afternoon, the few who knew of the sick man and his nurse, spoke of the latter as a "Mrs. Merton, from the country, probably." So when at night Mrs. Burt appeared and announced herself as ready to assume her duties, she was surprised at hearing herself addressed by her new name, and she was about to correct it when she thought, "It doesn't matter what I'm called, and perhaps, on the whole, I'd rather not be known by my real name. I don't believe much in goin' out nussin' anyway, and I guess I'll let 'em call me what they want to."

She accordingly made no explanation, but followed the servant girl up the three long flight of stairs, and turning down a narrow hall, stood ere long at the door of the sick room.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FEVER

NIGHT and day Frederic Raymond had traveled, never allowing himself a minute's rest, nor even stopping at Yonkers, so intent was he upon reaching New York and finding, if possible, some clew to Marian. It seemed a hopeless task, for he had no starting point—nothing which could guide him in the least, save the name of Sarah Green, and even that was not in the directory, while to inquire for her former place of residence, was as preposterous as Marian's inquiry for Mrs. Daniel Burt! Still, whatever he could do he did, traversing street after street, treading alley after alley, asking again and again of the squalid heads thrust from the dingy windows if Sarah Green had ever lived in that locality, and receiving always the same impudent stare and short answer, "No."

Once, in another and worse part of the city, he fancied he had found her, and that she had not sailed for Scotland as she had written, for they had told him that "Sal Green lived up in the fourth story," and climbing the crazy stairs, he knocked at the low, dark door, shuddering involuntarily and experiencing a feeling of mortified pride as he thought it possible that Marian—his wife—had toiled up that weary way to die. The door was opened by a blear-eyed, hard-faced woman, who started at the sight of the elegant stranger, and to his civil questions replied rather gruffly: "Yes, I'm Sal Green, I s'pose, or Sarah, jest which you choose to call me, but the likes of Marian Lindsey never came near me," and glancing around the dirty, wretched room, Frederic was glad that it was so. He would rather not find her, or hear tidings of her, than to know she had lived and died in such a place as this, and with a sickening sensation he was turning away, when the woman, who was blessed with a remarkable memory, and never forgot anything to which her attention was particularly directed, said to him: "You say it's a year last sence she left home?"

"Yes, yes," he replied, eagerly, and she continued: "You say she dressed in black, and wore a great long veil?"

"The same, the same," he cried, advancing into the room

and thrusting a bill into the long hand. "Oh, my good woman, have you seen her, and where is she now?"

"The Lord knows, mebby, but I don't," answered the woman, who was identical with the one who had so frightened Marian by watching her on that day when she sat in front of Trinity and wished that she could die. "I don't know as I have seen her at all," she continued, "but a year ago last November such a girl as you describe, with long curls that looked red in the sunshine, sat on the steps 'way down by Trinity and cried so hard that I noticed her, and knew she warn't a beggar by her dress. It was gettin' dark, and I was goin' to speak to her when Joe Black came up and asked what ailed her, or somethin'. He ain't none of the likeliest," and a grim smile flitted over the visage of the wrinkled hag.

"Oh, Heaven," cried Frederic, pressing his hands to his head, as if to crush the horrid fear. "God save her from that fate. Is that all you know? Can't you tell me any more? I'll give you half my fortune if you'll bring back my poor, lost Marian, just as she was when she left me."

The offer was a generous one, and Sal was tempted for a moment to tell him some big lie, and thus receive a companion to the bill she clutched so eagerly, but the agonizing expression of his white face kindled a spark of pity within her bosom, and she replied: "I did not finish tellin' you that while Joe was talkin' and had seemin'ly persuaded her to go with him, a tall chap that I never seen before knocked him flat, and took the girl with him, and that's why I remember it so well."

"Who was he, this tall man? Where did he go?" And Frederic wiped from his forehead the great drops of sweat forced out by terrible fear.

"I told you I never seen him before," was Sally's answer, "but he had a good face—a milk and water face—as if he never plotted no mischief in his life. She's safe with him, I'm sure. I'd trust my daughter with him, if I had one, and know he wouldn't harm her. He spoke to her tender like, and she looked glad, I thought."

Frederic felt that this information was better than none, for it was almost certain it was Marian whom the woman had seen, and in a measure comforted by her assurance of Ben Burt's honesty, he bade her good morning and walked rapidly away.

At last, worn out and discouraged, he returned to his hotel, where he now lay burning with fever and, in his delirium, calling sometimes for Isabel, sometimes for Alice, and again for faithful Dinah, but never asking why Marian did not

come. She was dead, and he only begged of those around him to take her away from Joe Black, or show him where her grave was made, so he could go home and tell the blind girl he had seen it. Every ray of light which it was possible to shut out had been excluded from the room, for he complained much of his eyes, and when Mrs. Burt entered, she could discover only the outline of a ghastly face resting upon the pillows, scarcely whiter than itself. It was a serious case, the attending physician said, and so she thought when she looked into his wild, bright eyes, and felt his rapid pulse. To her he put the same question he had asked of nearly everyone:

"Do you know where Marian is?"

"Marian!" she repeated, feeling a little uncertain how to answer.

"Humor him! Say you do!" whispered the physician, who was just taking his leave. And, very truthfully, Mrs. Burt replied:

"Yes, I know where she is! She will come to you tomorrow."

"No!" he answered mournfully. "The dead never come back, and it must not be, either. Isabel is coming then, and the two can't meet together here, for— Come nearer, woman, while I tell you! I loved Isabel the best, and that's what made the trouble. She is beautiful, but Marian was good, and do you know Marian was the heiress of Redstone Hall; but I'm not going to use her money."

"Yes, I know," returned Mrs. Burt, trying to quiet him, but in vain.

He would talk—sometimes of Marian, and sometimes of Sarah Green, and the dreary room where he had been.

"It made Marian tired," he said, "to climb those broken stairs—tired, just as he was now. But she was resting so quietly in heaven, and the April sun was shining on her grave. It was a little grave—a child's grave as it were—for Marian was not so tall, nor so old as Isabel."

In this way he rambled on, and it was not until the morning dawned that he fell into a heavy sleep, and Mrs. Burt had leisure to reflect upon the novel position in which she found herself.

"It was foolish of me to give up to them children," she said, "but now that I am here, I'll make the best of it, and do as well as I can. Marian shan't come, though! It would kill her to hear him going on."

Mrs. Burt was a little rash in making this assertion, for even while she spoke, Marian was in the reception room be-

low, inquiring for the woman who took care of Mr. Raymond. Not once during the long night had her eyelids closed in sleep, and with the early morning she had started for the hotel, leaving Ben to get his breakfast as he could.

"Say Marian Grey wishes to see her," she said, in answer to the inquiry as to what name the servant was to take to No. —.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Burt; "why didn't Ben keep her at home?" and, gliding down the stairs, she tried to persuade Marian to return.

But when she saw the firm, determined expression in the young girl's eye, she knew it was useless to reason with her, and saying rather pettishly, "You must expect to hear some cuttin' things," she bade her follow up the stairs. Frederic, still lay sleeping, his face turned partly to one side, and his hand resting beneath his head. His rich brown hair, now damp with heavy moisture, was pushed back from his white forehead, which, gleaming through the dusky darkness, first showed to Marian where he lay. The gaslight hurt his eyes, and the lamp, which was kept continually burning, was so placed that its dim light did not fall on him, and a near approach was necessary to tell her just how he looked. It was nearly a year and a half since she had seen him last, and she remembered him then as full of life and health. But now he was fearfully changed, and, with a bitter moan, she laid her head beside him on the pillow, so that her short curls mingled with his darker locks, and she felt his hot breath on her cheek.

"Frederic—dear Frederic!" she said, and at the sound of her voice he moved uneasily, as if about to awaken.

"Come away, come away," whispered Mrs. Burt. "He may know you, and a sudden start would kill him."

But Marian was deaf to all else save the whispered words dropping from the sick man's lips. They were of home, of Alice, of the library, and oh, joy! could it be that she heard aright—did he speak of her? Was it Marian he said? Yes, it was Marian, and with a cry of delight, which started Mrs. Burt to her feet, and penetrated even to the ear of the unconscious Frederic, she pressed her lips upon the very spot which they had touched before on that night when she gave him her first kiss. Slowly his eyes unclosed, but the wildness was still there, and Mrs. Burt, who stood anxiously watching him, felt glad that it was so. Slowly they wandered about the room, resting first upon the door, then on the chandelier, then on the ceiling above, and dropping finally lower and

lower, until at last they met and were riveted upon Marian, who, with clasped hands, stood breathlessly awaiting the result.

"Will he know her? Does he know her?" was the mental query of Mrs. Burt; while Marian's fast-breathing heart asked the same question eagerly. There was a wavering, as it would seem—a fierce struggle between delirium and reason, and then, with a faint smile, he said:

"Did you kiss me just now?" and he pointed to the spot upon his forehead.

Marian nodded, for she could not speak, and he continued:

"Marian kissed me there, too! Little Marian, who went away, and it has burned and burned into my veins until it set my brain on fire. Nobody has kissed me since, save Alice. Did you know Alice, girl?"

"Yes," answered Marian, keen disappointment swelling within her bosom and forcing the great tears from her eyes.

She had almost believed he would recognize her, but he did not; and sinking down by his side, she buried her face in the bedclothes, and sobbed aloud.

"Don't cry, little girl," he said, evidently disturbed at the sight of her tears. "I cried when I thought Marian was dead, but that seems so long ago."

"Oh, Frederic—" And forgetful of everything, Marian sprang to her feet. "Oh, Frederic, is it true? Did you cry for me?"

At the sound of his own name the sick man looked bewildered, while reason seemed struggling again to assert its rights and penetrate the misty fog by which it was enveloped. Very earnestly he looked at the young girl, who returned his gaze with one in which was concentrated all the yearning love and tenderness she had cherished for him so long.

"Are you Marian?" he said, and in an instant the excited girl wound her arms around his neck, and laying her cheek against his own, replied:

"Yes, Frederic, yes. Don't you know me, your poor lost Marian?"

Very caressingly he passed his hand over her short, silken curls—twined them about his long white fingers—pushed them back from her forehead—examined them more closely, and then whispered mournfully:

"No, you are not Marian. This is not her hair. But I like you," he continued, as he felt her tears drop on his face; "and I wish you to stay with me, and when the pain comes

back charm it away with your soft hands. They are little hands," and he took them between his own, "but not so small as Marian's were when I held one in mine and promised that I would love her. It seemed like some tiny roseleaf, and I could have crushed it easily, but I did not; I only crushed her heart, and she fled from me forever, for 'twas a lie I told her," and his voice sank to a lower tone. "I didn't love her then—I don't know as I love her now, for Isabel is so beautiful. Did you ever see Isabel, girl?"

"Oh, Frederic!" groaned Marian, and wresting her hands from his grasp, she tottered to a chair, while he looked after her wistfully.

"Will she go away?" he said to Mrs. Burt. "Will she leave me alone, when she knows Alice is not here, nor Isabel? I wish Isabel would come, don't you?"

There was another moan of anguish, and rolling his bright eyes in the direction of the armchair, the poor man whispered:

"Hark! that's the sound I heard the night Marian went away! I thought then 'twas the wind, but I knew afterwards that it was she, when her soul parted with her body, and it's followed me ever since. There is not a spot at Redstone Hall that is not haunted with that cry. I've heard it at midnight, at noonday—in the storm and in the rushing river—where we thought she was buried. All but Alice—she knew she wasn't, and she sent me here to look. She don't like Isabel, and is afraid I'll marry her. Maybe I shall, sometime! Who knows?"

And he laughed in delicious glee.

"Heaven keep me, too, from going mad!" cried Marian. "Oh, why did I come here?"

"I told you not to all the time," was Mrs. Burt's consolatory remark; which, however, was lost on Marian, who, seizing her bonnet and shawl, rushed from the room, unmindful of the outstretched arms which seemed imploring her to stay.

The fresh morning air revived her fainting strength, but did not cool the feverish agony at her heart, and she sped onward, until she reached her home, where she surprised Ben at his solitary breakfast, which he had prepared himself.

"Oh, Ben, Ben!" she cried, coming so suddenly upon him that he upset the coffee pot into which he was pouring some hot water. "Would it be wicked for you to kill me dead, or for me to kill myself?"

"What's to pay now?" asked Ben, using the skirt of his

coat for a holder in picking up the steaming coffee pot.

Very hastily Marian related her adventures in the sick room, telling him how Frederic had talked of marrying Isabel before her very face.

"Crazy as a loon," returned Ben. "I shouldn't think nothin' of that. You say he talked as though he thought you was dead, and of course he don't know what he's sayin'. Have they writ to his folks?"

"Yes," returned Marian, who had made a similar inquiry of Mrs. Burt. "They directed a letter to 'Frederic Raymond's friends, Franklin County, Kentucky,' but that may not reach them in a long time."

"Wouldn't it be a Christian act," returned Ben, "for us, who know jest who he is, to telegraph to that critter, and have her come? By all accounts he wants to see her, and it may do him good."

Marian felt that it would be right, and though it cost her a pang, she said at last:

"Yes, Ben, you may telegraph; but what name will you append?"

"Benjamin Butterworth, of course," he replied. "They'll remember the peddler, and think it nateral I should feel an interest." And leaving Marian to take charge of the breakfast table, he started for the office.

Meantime the sick room was the scene of much excitement —Frederic raving furiously, and asking for the girl with "the soft hands and silken hair." Sometimes he called her Marian, and begged of them to bring her back, promising not to make her cry again.

"There is a mystery connected with this Marian he talks so much about," said the physician, who was present, "and he seems to fancy a resemblance between her and the girl who left here this morning. What may I call her name?"

"Marian, my daughter," came involuntarily from Mrs. Burt, whose mental rejoinder was: "God forgive me for that lie, if it was one. Names and things is gettin' so twisted up that it takes more than me to straighten 'em!"

"Well, then," continued the physician, "suppose you send for her. It will never do for him to get so excited. He is wearing out too fast."

"I will go for her myself," said Mrs. Burt, who fancied some persuasion would be necessary ere Marian would be induced to return.

But she was mistaken, for when told that Frederic's life depended upon his being kept quiet, and his being kept quiet de-

pended upon her presence, Marian consented, and nerved herself to hear him talk, as she knew he would, of her rival.

"If he lives, I will be satisfied," she thought, "even though he never did or can love me," and with a strong, brave heart, she went back again to the sick man, who welcomed her joyfully and, folding his feeble arms around her neck, stroked again her hair, as he said: "You will not leave me, Marian, till Isabel is here. Then you may go—back to the grave I cannot find, and we will go home together."

Marian felt each day more and more that the wound she hoped had partly healed was bleeding afresh with a new pain, for while he talked of Marian as a mother talks of an unfortunate child, he spoke of Isabel with all a lover's pride, and each word was a dagger to the heart of the patient watcher, who sat beside him day and night, until her eyes were heavy, and her cheeks were pale with her unbroken vigils.

"Do you then love this Isabel so much?" she said to him one day, and sinking his voice to a whisper, he replied: "Yes, and I love you, too, though not like her because I loved her first."

"And Marian?" questioned the young girl. "Don't you love her?"

Oh, how eagerly she waited for the answer, which, when it came, almost broke her heart.

"Not as I ought to—not as I have prayed that I might, and not as I should, perhaps, have done, if she hadn't been to me what she is. Poor child," he continued, brushing away the tears which rolled like rain down Marian's cheeks, "poor child, are you crying for Marian?"

"Yes—yes, for Marian—for poor, heartbroken me"; and the wretched girl buried her face in the pillow beside him, for he held her firmly by the wrist, and she could not get away.

In this manner several days went by, and over the intellect so obscured there shone no ray of reason, while the girlish face grew whiter with each morning light, and at last the physician said that she must rest, or her strength would be exhausted.

"Let me stay a little while longer," she pleaded, "stay at least until Miss Huntington arrives."

"Miss who?" asked the doctor. "Do you, then, know his family?"

"A friend of mine knows them," answered Marian, a deep flush stealing over her cheek.

"I hope, then, they will reward you well," continued the

physician. "The young man would have died but for you. It is remarkable what control you have over him."

But Marian wished for no reward. It was sufficient for her to know that she had been instrumental in saving his life, even though she had saved it for Isabel. The physician said that Frederic was better, and that afternoon, seated in the large armchair, she fell into a sweet, refreshing sleep, from which she was finally aroused by Mrs. Burt, who, bending over her, whispered in her ear:

"Wake up. She's come—she's here—Miss Huntington!"

There was magic in that name, and it aroused the sleeping girl at once, sending a quiver of pain through her heart, for her post she knew must now be given to another. Not both of them could watch by Frederic, and she, the one who in all the world had the best right to stay, must go; but not until she had looked upon her rival and had seen once the face which Frederic called so beautiful. This done, she would go away and die, if it were possible, and stand no longer between Frederic and the bride he so much desired. She did not understand why he had so often spoken of herself as being dead, when he knew that she was not. It was a vagary of his brain, she said—he had had many since she came there, and she hoped he would sometimes talk of her to Isabel, just as he had talked of Isabel to her. There was a hurried consultation between herself and Mrs. Burt with regard to their future proceedings, and it was finally decided that the latter should remain a few days longer, and so report the progress of affairs to Marian, who, of course, must go away. This arrangement being made they sat down and rather impatiently waited the coming of Isabel, who was in her room resting after her tiresome journey.

"Oh, how can she wait so long?" thought Marian, glancing at Frederic, who was sleeping now more quietly than he had done before for a long time.

She did not know Isabel Huntington, and she could not begin to guess how thoroughly selfish she was, nor how that selfishness was manifest in every movement. The letter, which at last had gone to Frankfort, was received the same day with the telegram, and, as a natural consequence, threw the inmates of Redstone Hall into a great excitement. Particularly was this the case with Isabel, who, unmindful of everything, wrung her hands despairingly, crying out: "Oh, what shall I do if he dies?"

"Do," repeated Dinah, forgetting her own grief in her disgust. "For the Lord's sake, can't you do what you allus did?

Go back whar you come from, you and your mother, in course."

Isabel deigned no reply to this remark, but hurried to her chamber, where she commenced the packing of her trunk.

"Wouldn't it look better for me to go?" suggested Mrs. Huntington, and Isabel answered:

"Certainly not; the telegram was directed to me. No one knows me in New York, and I don't care what folks say here. If he lives, I shall be his wife, of course, else why should he send for me. It's perfectly natural that I should go." And thinking to herself that she would rather Frederic should die than to live for another, she completed her hasty preparations, and was on her way to the depot before the household had hardly had time to realize what they were doing.

Distressed and anxious as Isabel seemed, it was no part of her intentions to travel nights, for that would give her a sallow, jaded look; so she made the journey leisurely, and even after her arrival took time to rest and beautify ere presenting herself to Frederic. She had ascertained that he was better, and had the best of care, so she remained quietly in her chamber an hour or so, and it was not until after dark that she bade a servant show her to the sick room.

"I will tell them you are coming," suggested the polite attendant; and going on before her, he said to Mrs. Burt that "Miss Huntington would like to come in."

In the farthest corner of the room, where the shadows were the deepest, and where she would be the least observed, sat Marian, her hands clasped tightly together, her head bent forward, and her eyes fixed intently upon the door through which her rival would enter. Frederic was awake, and, missing her from her post, was about asking for her, when Isabel appeared, looking so fresh, so glowing, so beautiful, that for an instant Marian forgot everything in her admiration of the queenly creature, who, bowing civilly to Mrs. Burt, glided to the bedside, and sank upon her knees, gracefully—very gracefully—just as she had intended doing, and, in fact, just as she had done at a private rehearsal in her own room! Tighter the little hands were clasped together, and the head which had drooped before was erect now, as Marian watched eagerly for what would follow next.

"Dear Frederic," said Isabel, and over the white face in the armchair the hot blood rushed in torrents, for it seemed almost an insult to hear him thus addressed. "Dear Frederic, do you know me? I am Isabel"; and, unmindful of Mrs. Burt, or yet of the motionless figure sitting near, she kissed

his burning forehead, and said again: "Do you know me?"

The nails were making dark rings now in the tender flesh, while the blue eyes flashed until they grew almost as black as Isabel's, and still Marian did not move. She could not, until she heard what answer would be given. As the physician had predicted, Frederic was better since his refreshing sleep, and through the misty veil enshrouding his reason a glimmer of light was shining. The voice was a familiar one, and though it partially bewildered him, he knew who it was that bent so fondly over him. It was somebody from home, and with a thrill of pleasure akin to what one feels when meeting a fellow-countryman far on a foreign shore, he twined his arms around her neck, and said to her joyfully: "You are Isabel, and you've come to make me well."

Isabel was about to speak again, when a low sob startled her, and turning in the direction from whence it came, she met a fierce, burning gaze which riveted her as by some magnetism to the spot, and for a moment the two looked intently into each other's eyes. Isabel and Marian, the one stamping indelibly upon her memory the lineaments of a face which had stolen and kept a heart which should have been her own, while the other wondered much at the strange white face which even through the darkness seemed quivering with pain.

Purposely Mrs. Burt stepped between them, and thus the spell was broken, Isabel turning again to Frederic, while Marian, unlocking her stiff fingers, grasped her bonnet, and glided from the room so silently that Isabel knew not she was gone until she turned her head and found the chair empty.

"Who was that?" she said to Mrs. Burt, "that young girl who just went out?"

"My daughter," answered Mrs. Burt, again mentally asking forgiveness for the falsehood told, and thinking to herself, "Mercy knows it ain't my nater to lie, but when a body gets mixed up in such a scrape as this, I'd like to see 'em help it!"

After the first lucid interval, Frederic relapsed again into his former delirious mood, but did not ask for Marian. He seemed satisfied that Isabel was there, and he fell asleep again, resting so quietly that when it was eleven Isabel arose and said: "He is doing well. I believe I will retire. I never sat up with a sick person in my life, and should be very little assistance to you. That daughter of yours is somewhere around, I suppose, and will come if you need help."

It was long after daylight ere Isabel awoke, and when she did her first thought was of the girl she had seen the night before. "How white she was," she said, as she made her

elaborate toilet, "and how those eyes of hers glared at me, as if I had no business here. Maybe she has fallen in love while taking care of him"; and Isabel laughed aloud at the very idea of a nursing woman's daughter being in love with the fastidious Frederic! Once she thought of Mrs. Daniel Burt, wondering where she lived, and half wishing she could find her, and, herself unknown, could question her of Marian.

"Maybe this Mrs. Merton knows something of her," she said, and thinking she would ask her if a good opportunity should occur, she gave an extra brush to her glossy hair, looked in a small hand mirror to see that the braids at the back of her head were right, threw open her wrapper a little more to show her flounced cambric skirt and then went to the breakfast room, where three attendants, attracted by her style and the prospects of a fee, bowed obsequiously and asked what she would have. This occupied nearly another hour, and it was almost ten ere she presented herself to Mrs. Burt, who was growing very faint and weary.

At the physician's request, more light had been admitted into the room, and Frederic, who was much better this morning, recognized Isabel at once. He had a faint remembrance of having seen her the previous night, but it needed Mrs. Burt's assertion to confirm his conjecture, and he greeted her now as if meeting her for the first time. Many questions he asked her of the people at home, and how they had learned of his illness.

"We received a letter and a telegram, both," said Isabel, continuing: "You remember that booby peddler who sold Alice the bracelet and frightened the negroes so? Well, he must have telegraphed, for his name was signed to the dispatch, 'Benjamin Butterworth.'"

Mrs. Burt was very much occupied with something near the table, and Frederic did not notice her confusion, as he replied, "He was a kind-hearted man, I thought, but I wonder how he knew of my illness, and where he is now. Mrs. Merton, has a certain Ben Butterworth inquired for me since I was sick?"

"I know nobody by that name," returned Mrs. Burt, and without stopping to think that her question might lead to some inquiries from Frederic, Isabel rejoined: "Well, do you know a Mrs. Daniel Burt?"

"Mrs. Daniel Burt!" repeated Frederic, as if trying to recall something far back in the past, while the lady in question started so suddenly as to drop the cup of hot water she held in her hand.

Stooping down to pick up the cup, she said something about its having burned her, and added: "I ain't much acquainted in the city, and never know my next-door neighbors."

"Mrs. Daniel Burt?" Frederic said again. "I have surely heard that name before. Who is she, Isabel?"

It was Isabel's turn now to answer evasively; but being more accustomed to dissimulate than her companion, she replied, quite as a matter of course: "You may have heard mother speak of her in New Haven. I used to know her when I was a little girl, and I believe she lives in New York. She was a very good, but a very common kind of woman, and one with whom I should not care to associate, though mother, I dare say, would be glad to hear from her."

"The impudent trollop," muttered Mrs. Burt, marveling at the conversation, and wondering which was trying to deceive the other, Frederic or Isabel. "The former couldn't hoodwink her," she said, "even if he did Isabel. She understood it all, and he knew who Mrs. Daniel Burt was just as well as she did, for even if he had forgotten that she once lived with his father, Marian's letter had refreshed his memory, and he was only 'putting on' for the sake of misleading Isabel. But where in the world did that jade know her?" that was a puzzle, and settling it in her own mind that there were two of the same name, she left the room and went down to her breakfast.

In the morning Frederic was better than he had been before. Mrs. Burt, who had watched him carefully, knew that the danger was past, and that afternoon she left him with Isabel, while she went home, where she found Marian seriously ill, with Ben taking care of her in his kind but awkward manner.

"Did Frederic remember me? Does he know I have been there?" were Marian's first questions, and when Mrs. Burt replied in the negative, she turned away, whispering mournfully: "It is just as well."

"He is doing well," said Mrs. Burt, "and as you need me more than he does now, I shall come home and let that Isabel take care of him. It won't hurt her any, the jade. She can telegraph for her mother if she chooses."

Accordingly, she returned to the sick room, where she found Frederic asleep and Isabel reading a novel. To her announcement of leaving, the latter made no objection. She was rather pleased than otherwise, for, as Frederic grew stronger, the presence of a third person, and a stranger, too, might be disagreeable. She would telegraph for her mother,

of course, as she did not think it quite proper to stay there alone. But her mother was under her control; she could dispose of her at any time, so she merely stopped her reading long enough to say: "Very well, you can go if you like. How much is your charge?"

Mrs. Burt did not hesitate to tell her; and Isabel, who had taken care of Frederic's purse, paid her, and then resumed her book, while Mrs. Burt, with a farewell glance at her patient, went from the room, without a word of explanation as to where she could be found in case they wished to find her.

It was dark when Frederic awoke, and it was so still around him that he believed himself alone.

"They have all left me," he said; "Mrs. Merton, Isabel, and that other one, that being of mystery—who was she—who could she have been?" and, shutting his eyes, he tried to bring her before him just as he had often seen her bending o'er his pillow.

He knew now that it was not a phantom of his brain, but a reality. There had been a young girl there, and when the world without was darkest, and he was drifting far down the river of death, her voice had called him back, and her hands had held him up so that he did not sink in the deep, angry waters. There were tears many times upon her face, he remembered, and once he had wiped them away, asking why she cried. It was a pretty face, he said, a very pretty face, and the saucy eyes of blue seemed shining on him even now, while the memory of her gentle acts was very, very sweet, thrilling him with an undefined emotion, and awakening within his bosom a germ of that undying love he was yet to feel for that mysterious stranger. She had called him Frederic, too, while he had called her Marian. She had answered to that name, she had asked him of Isabel, and—"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, starting quickly, and clasping both hands upon his head. Like a thunderbolt it burst upon him, and for an instant his brain seemed all on fire. "It was Marian—it was Marian!" he essayed to say, but his lips refused to move, and when Isabel, startled by his sudden movement, struck a light and came to his bedside, she saw that he had fainted!

In great alarm she summoned help, begging of those who came to go at once for Mrs. Merton. But no one knew of the woman's place of residence, and as she had failed to inquire, it was a hopeless matter. Slowly Frederic came back to consciousness, and when he was again alone with Isabel, he said to her: "Where is that woman who took care of me?"

"She is gone," said Isabel. "Gone to her home."

"Gone!" he repeated. "Where did she go, and why?"

Isabel told him the particulars of Mrs. Burt's going, and he continued:

"Was there no one else here when you came? No young girl with soft blue eyes?" and he looked eagerly at her.

"Yes," she replied. "There was a queer acting thing sitting in the armchair the night I first came in—"

"Who was she, and where is she now?" he asked; and Isabel answered: "I am sure I don't know where she is, for she vanished like a ghost."

"Yes, yes; but who was she? Did she have no name?" and Frederic clutched Isabel's arm nervously.

"Mrs. Merton told me it was her daughter—that is all I know," said Isabel; and in a tone of disappointment, he continued:

"Will you tell me just how she looked, and how she acted when you first saw her?"

"One would suppose you deeply interested in your nurse's daughter"; and the glittering black eyes flashed scornfully upon Frederic, who replied:

"I am interested, for she saved my life. Tell me, won't you, how she looked?"

"Well, then," returned Isabel pettishly, "she was about fifteen, I think—certainly not older than that. Her face was very white, with big, blue eyes, which glared at me like a wild beast's; and what is queerer than all she actually sobbed when I, or rather you, kissed me; perhaps you have forgotten that you did?"

He had forgotten it, for the best of reasons, but he did not contradict her, so intent was he upon listening to her story.

"I had not observed her particularly before; but when I heard that sound I turned to look at her, while she stared at me as impudently as if I had no business here. That woman stepped between us purposely, I know, for she seemed excited; and when I saw the armchair again, the girl was gone."

Thus far everything, except the probable age, had confirmed his suspicions; but there was one question more—an all-important one—and with trembling eagerness, he asked:

"What of her hair? Did you notice that?"

"It was brown, I think," said Isabel, "short in her neck and curly around her forehead. I should say her hair was rather handsome."

With a sigh of disappointment, Frederic turned upon his pillow, saying to her:

"That will do—I've heard enough."

Isabel's last words had brought back to his mind something which he had forgotten until now—the girl's hair was short, and he remembered distinctly twining the soft rings around his fingers. They were not long, red curls, like those described by Sally Green. It wasn't Marian's hair—it wasn't Marian at all; and in his weakness his tears dropped silently upon the pillow, for the disappointment was terrible. All that night and the following day he was haunted with thoughts of the young girl, and at last, determining to see her again, and know if she were like Marian, he said to Isabel:

"Send for Mrs. Merton. I wish to talk with her."

"It is an impossibility," returned Isabel; "for when she left us, I carelessly neglected to ask where she lived—"

"Inquire below, then," persisted Frederic. "Somebody will certainly know, and I must find her."

Isabel complied with the request, and soon returned with the information that no one knew aught of Mrs. Merton's whereabouts, though it was generally believed that she came from the country, and at the time of coming to the hotel was visiting friends in the city.

"Find her friends, then," continued Frederic, growing more and more excited and impatient.

This, too, was impossible, for everything pertaining to Mrs. Merton was mere conjecture. No one could tell where she lived, or whither she had gone; and the sick man lamented the circumstance so often that Isabel once more lost her temper entirely, wondering why he should be so very anxious about a woman who had been well paid for her services—"yes, more than paid, for her price was a most exorbitant one."

Meantime, Mrs. Huntington, who, on the receipt of Isabel's telegram, had started immediately, arrived laden with trunks, handboxes, and bags, for the old lady was rather dressy, and fancied a large hotel a good place to show her new clothes. On learning that Frederic was very much better, and that she had been sent for merely on the score of propriety, she seemed somewhat out of humor. "Not that she wanted Frederic to die," she said, "and she was glad of course that he was getting well, but she didn't like to be scared the way she was; a telegram always made her stomach tremble so that she didn't get over it in a week; she had traveled day and night to get there, and didn't know what she should have done if she hadn't met Rudolph McVicar in Cincinnati."

"Rudolph!" exclaimed Isabel. "Pray, where is he now?"

"Here in this very hotel," returned her mother. "He came with me all the way, and seemed greatly interested in you,

asking a thousand questions about when you expected to be married. Said he supposed Frederic's illness would postpone it a while, and when I told him you wasn't even engaged as I knew of, he looked disappointed. I believe Rudolph has reformed!"

"The wretch!" muttered Isabel, who rightly guessed that Rudolph's interest was only feigned.

He had heard of her sudden departure for New York, and he had heard also—Agnes Gibson being the source whence the information came—that she might, perhaps, be married as soon as Frederic was able to sit up. Accordingly, he had himself started northward, stumbling upon Mrs. Huntington in Cincinnati, and coming with her to New York, where he stopped at the same hotel, intending to remain there and wait for the result. He did not care to meet Isabel face to face, while she was quite anxious to avoid an interview with him; and after a few days she ceased to be troubled about him at all. Frederic absorbed all her thoughts, he appeared so different from what he used to be—talking but little either to herself or her mother, and lying nearly all the day with his eyes shut, though she knew he was not asleep; and she tried in vain to fathom the subject of his reflections. But he guarded that secret well, and day after day he thought on, living over again the first weeks of his sickness in that chamber, until at last the conviction was fixed upon his mind that, spite of her short hair, spite of the probable age, spite of the story about Mrs. Merton's daughter, or yet the letter from Sarah Green, that young girl who had watched with him so long and then disappeared so mysteriously, was none other than Marian—his wife. He did not shudder now when he repeated that last word to himself. It sounded pleasantly, for he knew it was connected with the sweet, womanly love which had saved him from death. The brown hair which Isabel had mentioned he rejected as an impossibility. It had undoubtedly looked dark to her, but it was red still, though worn short in her neck, for he remembered that distinctly. Sarah Green's letter was a forgery—Alice's predictions were true, and Marian still lived.

But where was she now? Why had she left him so abruptly, and would he ever find her? Yes, he would, he said. He would spare no time, no pains, no money in the search; and when he found her he would love and cherish her as she deserved. He was beginning to love her now, and he wondered at his infatuation for Isabel, whose real character was becoming more and more apparent to him. His changed de-

meanor made her cross and fretful; while Agnes Gibson's letter, asking when she was to be married, and saying people there expected her to return to Kentucky a bride, only increased her ill humor, which manifested itself several times toward her mother, in Frederic's presence.

At last, in a fit of desperation, she wrote to Agnes Gibson that she never expected to be married—certainly not to Frederic Raymond—and if every young lady matrimonially inclined should nurse her intended husband through a course of fever, she guessed they would become disgusted with mankind generally, and that man in particular! This done, Isabel felt better—so much better, indeed, that she resolved upon another trial to bring about her desired object, and one day, about two weeks after her mother's arrival, she said to Frederic:

"Now that you are nearly well, I believe I shall go to New Haven, and, after a little, mother will come, too. I shall remain there, I think, though mother, I suppose, will keep house for you this year, as she has engaged to do."

To this suggestion Frederic did not reply just as she thought he would.

It was a good idea, he said, for her to visit her old home, and he presumed she would enjoy it. Then he added, very faintly: "Alice will need a teacher here quite as much as in Kentucky, and you can retain your situation if you choose."

Isabel bit her lip, and her black eyes flashed angrily, as she replied:

"I am tired of teaching only one pupil, for there is nothing to interest me, and I am all worn out, too."

She did look pale, and, touched with pity, Frederic said to her, very kindly:

"You do seem weary, Isabel. You have been confined with me too long, and I think you had better go at once. I will run down to see you, if possible, before I return to Kentucky."

This gave her hope, and, drying her eyes, which were filled with tears, Isabel chatted pleasantly with him about his future plans, which had been somewhat disarranged by his unexpected illness. He could not now hope to get settled at Riverside, as he called his new home, until some time in June—perhaps not so soon—but he would let her know, he said, in time to meet him there.

A day or two after this conversation Isabel started for New Haven, whither in the course of a week she was followed by both her mother and Rudolph, the latter of whom was determined not to lose sight of her until sure that the engagement, which he somewhat doubted, did not in reality exist.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SEARCH

When the carriage containing Mrs. Huntington rolled away from the hotel, Frederic, who was standing upon the steps, experienced a feeling of relief in knowing that, as far as personal acquaintances were concerned, he was now alone and free to commence his search for Marian. Each day the conviction had been strengthened that she was alive—that she had been with him a few weeks before—and now every energy should be devoted to finding her. Once he thought of advertising, but she might not see the paper, and as he rather shrank from making his affairs thus public, he abandoned the project, determining, however, to leave no other means untried; he would hunt the city over, inquire at every house, and then scour the surrounding country. It might be months, or it might be years, ere his object were accomplished; but accomplish it he would, and with a brave, hopeful heart, he started out, taking first a list of all the Mertons in the directory, then searching them out and making of them the most minute inquiries, except, indeed, in cases where he knew, by the nature of their surroundings, that none of their household had officiated in the capacity of nurse. The woman who had taken care of him was poor and uneducated, and consequently he confined himself mostly to that class of people.

But all in vain. No familiar face ever came at his call. Nobody knew her whom he sought—no one had heard of Marian Lindsey.

It was now three weeks since he commenced his search and he was beginning to despair of success. His presence, he knew, was needed in Kentucky, where Alice was left alone with the negroes, and where his arrangements for moving were not yet complete. His house on the river was waiting for him, the people wondering why he did not come, and as he sat thinking it all over, he resolved at last to go home and bring Alice to Riverside—to send for Mrs. Huntington as had been previously arranged, and then begin the search again. Of Isabel, too, he thought, remembering his hasty promise of going to New Haven, but this he could not do. So he penned her a few lines, telling her it was impossible

for him to come, and saying that on his return to Riverside with Alice, he should expect to find her mother and herself waiting to receive him.

"I cannot do less than this," he said. "Isabel has been with me a long time, and though I do not feel toward her as I did, I pity her; for I am afraid she likes me better than she should. I have given her encouragement, too; but when I come back, I will talk with her candidly. I will tell her how it is, and offer her a home with me so long as she shall choose to stay. I will be to her a brother; and when Marian is found, the two shall be like sisters, until some man who has not a wife already takes Isabel from my hands."

Thus deciding, Frederic wrote to Alice, telling her when he should probably be home, and saying he should stop for a day or so at Yonkers.

That afternoon, as Frederic was sauntering leisurely down the street in the direction of the depot—for he intended going to Yonkers that night—he stumbled upon Ben, whose characteristic exclamation was: "Wall, square, glad to see you out ag'in, but I didn't b'lieve I ever should when I sent word to that gal. She come, I s'pose?"

"Yes," returned Frederic, "and I am grateful to you for your kindness in telegraphing to my friends. How did you know I was sick?"

"Oh, I'm allus 'round," said Ben. "Know one of them boys at the hotel, and he told me. I s'posed you'd die, and I should of come to see you mabby, only I had to go off peddlin'. Bizness afore pleasure, you know."

This remark seemed to imply that Frederic's dying would have been a source of pleasure to the Yankee, but the young man knew that he did not intend it, and the two walked on together; Ben plying his companion with questions, and learning that both Isabel and Mrs. Huntington were now in New Haven, but would probably go to Riverside when Frederic returned from Kentucky.

"That's a grand place," said Ben; "fixed up in tiptop style, too. I took my sister out to see it, and she thought 'twas pretty slick. Wouldn't wonder if you're goin' to marry that black-haired gal, by the looks of things?" and Ben's gray eyes peered sideways at Frederic, who replied: "I certainly have no such intentions."

"You don't say it," returned Ben. "I shouldn't of took the trouble to sent for her if I hadn't s'posed you was kinder courtin'. My sister thought you was, and she or'to know, bein's she's been through the mill."

Frederic winced under Ben's pointed remarks, and as a means of changing the conversation, said: "If I am not mistaken, you spoke of your sister when in Kentucky, and Alice became quite interested. I've heard her mention the girl several times. What is her name?"

"Do look at that hoss—flat on the pavement. He's a goner," Ben exclaimed, by way of gaining a little time.

Frederic's attention was immediately diverted from Ben, who thought to himself: "I'll try him with half the truth, and if he's anyways bright he'll guess the rest."

"You as't my sister's name. They tried hard to call her Mary Ann, I s'pose. My way of thinkin' 'tain't neither one nor t'other, though mabby you'll like it—Marian; 'tain't a common name. Did you ever hear it afore?"

"Marian!" gasped Frederic, turning instantly pale, while a strange, undefinable feeling swept over him—a feeling that he had never been so near finding her as now.

"Excuse me, square," said Ben, whose keen eye lost not a single change in the expression of Frederic's face. "I'm such a blunderin' critter! That little blind gal told me your first wife was Marian, and I or'to known better than to harrer your feelings with the name."

"Never mind," returned Frederic faintly, "but tell me of your sister—and now I think of it, you said once you were from Down East, which I supposed referred to one of the New England States; Vermont, perhaps?"

"Did use to live in Massachusetts," replied Ben. "But can't a feller move?"

Frederic admitted that he could, and Ben continued: "I or'to told you, I s'pose, that Marian ain't my own flesh and blood—she's adopted, that's all. But I love her jest the same. Her name is Marian Grey," and Ben looked earnestly at Frederic, thinking to himself: "Won't he take the hint when he knows, or at least had or'to know that her mother's name was Grey?"

But hints were lost on Frederic. He had no suspicion of the truth, and Ben proceeded: "All her kin is dead, and as mother hadn't no daughter she took this orphan, and I'm workin' hard to give her a good schoolin'. She can play the pianner like fury, and talks the French grammar most as well as I do the English!"

This brought a smile to Frederic's face, and he did not for a moment think of doubting Ben's word.

"You seem very proud of your sister," he said at last, "and as I owe you something for caring for me and telegraphing

for my friends, let me show my gratitude by giving you something for this Marian Grey. What shall it be? Is she fond of jewelry? Most young girls are."

Ben stuck his hands in his trousers pocket and seemed to be thinking, then, removing his hands, he replied: "Mabby you'll think it sassy, but there is somethin' that would please us both. I told her about you when I came from Kentucky and she cried like a baby over that blind gal. Then, when you was sick, she felt worried ag'in, and wanted the wust kind to see you, 'cause, I beg your pardon, square, but I told her you was han'some. Jest give us your picter, if it ain't bigger than my thumb, and would it be asking too much for you when you git home to send me the blind gal's. She's an angel, and I should feel so good to have her face in my pocket. You can direct to Ben Butterworth—but law, you won't, I know you won't."

"Why not?" asked Frederic, laughing at the novel request. "Mine you shall surely have, and Alice's also, if she consents. Come with me now, for we are opposite a photograph gallery."

The result of this was that in a short time Ben held in his hand a correct likeness of Frederic, which was of priceless value to him, because he knew how highly it would be prized by her for whom alone he had requested it.

As they passed out into the street again, Frederic said to him rather abruptly: "Do you know Sarah Green?"

"No," answered Ben, and Frederic continued:

"Do you know Mrs. Merton?"

Ben started a little, and then, repeating the name, replied: "Ain't acquainted with that name neither. Who is she?"

"She took care of me," returned Frederic, "and I would like to find her and thank her for her kindness."

"I shouldn't s'pose she could of took care of you alone, sick as you was," said Ben, waiting eagerly for the answer, which, had it been what he desired, might have led to the unfolding of the mystery.

But Frederic shrank from making Ben his confidant. "It was hard for her until Miss Huntington came."

"Blast Miss Huntington," thought Ben, now thoroughly satisfied that his companion did not care to discover Marian or he would certainly say something about her.

Both she and his mother were sure that he knew she had been with him in his sickness, and if he really wished to find her, he would speak of her as well as of Mrs. Merton.

"But he don't," thought Ben. "He don't care a straw for her, and she's right when she says she won't run after him

any more. He don't like Isabel none too well, and I raally b'lieve the man is crazy."

This settled the matter satisfactorily with Ben, who accompanied Frederic to the depot, waiting there until the departure of the train.

"Give my regrets to that Josh, and the rest of the niggers, and don't on no account forget the picter," were his last words as he quitted the car, and then hurried home impatient to show Marian his surprise.

He found her sitting by the open window—a listless, dreamy look in her blue eyes, and a sad expression upon her face, which said that her thoughts were far away in the Southland, where Nature had decked her beautiful home with all the glories of the merry month of May and the first bright days of June.

"Darling Alice," she murmured, "I shall never see her again"; and her tears were dropping upon her lap just as Ben came in, and began:

"Wall, wee one, I've seen the square, and talked with him of you."

"Oh, Ben, Ben!"—and Marian's face was spotted with her excitement—"what made you? What did he say, and where is he?"

"Gone home," answered Ben; "but he had this took on purpose for you"; and he tossed the picture into her lap.

"It is—it is Frederic. Oh, Mrs. Burt, it is," and Marian's lips touched the glass, from which the face of Frederic Raymond looked kindly out upon her.

It was thinner than when she used to know it, but fuller, stronger looking than when it lay among the tumbled pillows. The eyes, too, were hollow, and not so bright, while it seemed to her that the rich, brown hair was not so thrifty as of old. But it was Frederic still, her Frederic, and she pressed it again to her lips, while her heart thrilled with the joyful thought that he remembered her, and had sent her this priceless token. But why had he gone home without her—why had he left her there alone if he really cared for finding her? Slowly, as a cloud obscures a summer sky, a shadow crept over her face—a shadow of doubt, of distrust. There was something she had not heard, and with quivering lip she said to Ben: "What does it mean? You have not told me why he sent it."

It was cruel to deceive her as he had done, and so Ben thought when he saw the heaving of her chest, the pressure of her hands, and, more than all, the whiteness of her face, as

he told her why Frederic sent to her that picture; that it was not taken for Marian Lindsey, but rather for Marain Grey, adopted sister of Benjamin Butterworth.

"He does not wish to find me," said Marian, when Ben had finished speaking. "We shall never be reconciled, and it is just as well, perhaps."

"I think so, too," rejoined Ben, "or at any rate, I'd let him rest for a spell, and learn everything there is in books for womankind to learn. You shall go to college if you say so, and bimeby, when the Old Nick himself wouldn't know you, I'll get you a chance to teach that blind gal, and he'll fall in love with his own wife; see if he don't," and Ben stroked the curls within his reach very caressingly, thinking to himself: "I won't tell her now 'bout Alice's picter, 'cause it may not come, but I'll cheer her up the best way that I can. She grows handsomer every day of her life," and as this, in Ben's estimation, was the one thing of all others to be desired by Marian, he could not forbear complimenting her aloud upon her rapid improvement in looks.

"Thank you," she answered, smiling faintly, for, to her, beauty or accomplishments were of little avail if, in the end, Frederic's love were not secured.

CHAPTER XV

HOME AGAIN

FREDERIC was coming home again—"Marster Frederic," who, as Dinah said, "had been so near to kingdom-come that he could hear the himes they sung on Sundays."

Joyfully the blacks told to each other the glad news, which was an incentive for them all to bestir themselves as they had not done before during the whole period of their master's absence.

Dear little Alice! She built bright castles in the air that summer day, and they were as real to her as if Frederic had written: "Marian is found and coming home with me."

"She loved a great many flowers around her," she said, and groping her way down the stairs and out into the yard, she gathered from the tree beneath the library window a profusion of buds and half-opened roses, which she arranged into bouquets, and placed in vases for Marian, just as Marian had gathered flowers for her from the garden far away on the river.

It was done at last; and very inviting that pleasant, airy apartment looked with its handsome furniture, its bright carpet and muslin curtains of snowy white, to say nothing of the towering beds. There were flowers on the mantel, flowers on the table, flowers in the window, flowers everywhere, and their sweet perfume filled the air with a delicious fragrance, which Dinah declared was "a heap sight better than that scent Miss Isabel used to put on her hankercher and fan. Ugh, that fan!" and Dinah's nose was elevated at the very thought of Isabel's sandal-wood fan, which had been her special abhorrence.

"Isn't it most time for Uncle Phil to start?" asked Alice, when Dinah had finished fixing the room.

"Yes, high time," answered Dinah, "but Phil is so slow. I'll jest hurry him up," and, followed by Alice, she descended the stairs, meeting in the lower hall with Lyd, who held in her hand a brown envelope, which she passed to Alice, saying: "One dem letters what come like lightnin' on the telegraph. A boy done brung it."

"A telegram," cried Alice, feeling at first alarmed. "Go for Mrs. Warren to read it."

But the overseer's wife was absent, as was also her husband, and neither the blacks nor Alice knew what to do.

"There isn't more than a line and a half," said Alice, passing her finger over the paper and feeling the thick sand which had been sifted upon it. "I presume something has detained Frederic, and he has sent word that he will not be here to-day."

"Le' me see dat ar," said Phil, who liked to impress his companions with a sense of his superior wisdom, and, adjusting his iron-bowed spec's, he took the letter, which in reality was Greek to him.

After an immense amount of wry faces and loud whispering he said:

"Yes, honey, you're correct, though Marster Frederic has sich an onery hand-write that it takes me a heap of time to make it out. It reads, 'Somethin' has detained Frederic, and he has sent word that he'll be here to-morry.'" And, with the utmost gravity, Phil took off his spec's and was walking away with the air of one who has done something his companions could never hope to do, when Hetty called out:

"Wonder if he 'spects us to swaller dat ar, and think he kin read, when he just done said over what Miss Alice say. Can't fool dis chile."

But alas for Uncle Phil. Mrs. Warren had made a mistake in Frederic's last letter, the young man writing he should be home the fifteenth, whereas she had read it the seventeenth; afterward, Frederic had decided to leave Riverside one day earlier, and had telegraphed from Cincinnati for Phil to meet him. Finding neither carriage nor servant in waiting, he hired a conveyance, and about four o'clock P. M. from every cabin door there came the joyful cry:

"Marster Frederic has come."

"Told you so," said Hetty, with an exultant glance at Uncle Phil, who wisely made no reply, but hastened with the rest to tell his master: "How d'ye?"

"How is it that someone did not meet me?" Frederic asked, after the first noisy outburst had somewhat subsided. "Didn't you get the dispatch?"

The negroes looked at Phil, who stammered out:

"Yes, we done got it, but dem old iron spec's of mine is mighty nigh wore out; can't see in 'em at all, and I read 'tomorrowy,' instead of 'today.'"

The loud shout which followed this excuse enlightened Frederic as to the true state of the case, and he, too, joined in the laugh, telling the crestfallen Phil that "he should surely

have a new pair of silver spec's which would read 'today' instead of 'to-morry.'"

"But where is Alice?" he continued. "Why don't she come to greet me?"

"Sure 'nough," returned Dinah. "Whar kin she be, when she was so fierce to have you come! Reckon she's up in the best charmber, she's been fixin' up for somethin', she wouldn't tell what."

"I'll go and see," said Frederic, starting in quest of the little girl, who, as Dinah had conjectured, was in the front chamber—the one prepared with so much care for Marian.

She had been sitting by the window when she heard the sound of wheels coming up the avenue. Then the joyful cry of "Marster's comin'," came to her quick ear, and, starting up, she bent her head to listen for another voice—a voice she had not heard for many a weary month. But she listened in vain, for Marian was not there. Gradually she became convinced of the fact, and, laying her face upon the window sill, she was weeping bitterly, when Frederic came in. Pausing for a moment in the door, he glanced around, first at the well-remembered chair, then at the books upon the table, then at the flowers, and then he knew why all this had been done.

"I would that it might have been so," he thought, and going to the weeping Alice he lifted up her head and pushing her hair from her forehead, whispered to her softly: "Darling, was it for Marian you gathered all these flowers?"

"Yes, Frederic, for Marian," and Alice sobbed aloud.

Taking her in his lap, Frederic replied, "Did you think I would bring her home?"

"Yes, I thought you had found her, and I was so glad. What made you write me that?"

"Alice, I did find her," returned Frederic; "I have seen her, I have talked with her. Marian is alive."

At these words, so decidedly spoken, the blind eyes flashed up into Frederic's face eagerly, wistfully, as if they fain would burst their veil of darkness and see if he told her truly.

"Is it true? Oh, Frederic, you are not deceiving me? I can't bear any more disappointment," and Alice's face and lips were white as ashes, as she proceeded further to question Frederic, who told her of the blue-eyed girl who, just as he was treading the brink of the river of death, had come to him and called him back to life by her kind acts and words of love.

"She has a sweet, childish face," said he, "fairer, sweeter

than Marian's when she went away—but Marian must have changed, for I know that this was she."

"Frederic," she began, and her little hand played with his hair, as it always did when she was uncertain as to how her remarks would be received. "Frederic, ain't you loving Marian a heap more than you did when she went away?"

Frederic did not hesitate a moment, ere replying: "Yes, darling, I am, for that young girl crept away down into my heart, where Marian ought to have been, before I asked her to be my wife; and I shall find her, too. I only stopped long enough to come home for you. The house is ready at Riverside, and your room is charming."

"Will Isabel be there?" was Alice's next inquiry, and Frederic answered her by telling her what he knew of the matter.

It was nearly three weeks ere Frederic's arrangements for leaving Kentucky were entirely completed, and it was not until the latter part of July that he finally started for his new home. The lamentations of the negroes were noisy in the extreme, though far more moderate than they would have been if their master had not said it was very probable he should return in the autumn, and merely make Riverside a summer residence. If he found Marian he should come back, of course, he thought, but he did not deem it best to raise hopes which might never be realized, so he said nothing of her to the blacks, who supposed, of course, that she was dead.

It was at the close of a sultry summer day when the travelers reached Riverside, where they found Mrs. Huntington waiting to receive them. Frederic had written, apprising her of the time when he should probably arrive, and asking her to be there if possible. Something, too, he had said of Isabel, but that young lady was not in the most amiable mood, and, as she was comfortably domesticated with another distant relative, she declined going to Frederic until he came to some understanding, or at least manifested a greater desire to have her with him than his recent letters indicated. Accordingly, her mother went alone, and Frederic was not sorry, while Alice was delighted. Everything seemed so light and airy, she said, just as though a load were taken from them, and like a bird she flitted about the house, for she needed to pass through a room but once ere she was familiar with its location, and could find it easily. With her own cozy chamber she was especially pleased, and in less than half an hour her little hands had examined every article of furniture, even to the vases which held the withered blossoms gathered so long ago.

"Somebody must have put these here for me," she said, and then her mind went back to the morning when she, too, had gathered flowers for an expected friend, and she wondered much who had done a similar service for her.

Hearing a step in the hall, she asked who was there.

"It's me," returned Mrs. Russell, who was still staying at Riverside. "Now, I wonder if you found them dried-up things so soon," she continued, advancing into the room. "I should have 'em out, only that the girl who fixed 'em made me promise to leave 'em till you came. 'Pears like she b'lieved you'd think more on 'em for knowin' that she picked 'em."

"Girl! Mrs. Russell. What girl?" And Alice's eyes lighted up, for she thought at once of Marian, who would know, of course, about the house, and as she would naturally wish to see it, she had come some day and left these flowers, which would be so dear to her if she found her suspicions correct. "Who was the girl?" she asked again, and Mrs. Russell replied:

"I don't remember her name, but she went all over the house, fixing things in Mr. Raymond's room, which I didn't think was very marnerly, bein' that 'twan't none o' her'n. Then she come in here and set ever so long before she picked these posies, which she told me not to throw away."

"Yes, it was Marian," came involuntarily from Alice's lips, while the woman, catching at her name, rejoined:

"That sounds like what he called her—that tall, spooky chap, her brother—Ben something. She said he had seen you at the South."

"Oh, Ben Butterworth. It was his adopted sister"; and Alice turned away, feeling greatly disappointed that Marian Grey, and not Marian Lindsey, had arranged those flowers for her.

Not long after this, something which Mrs. Huntington said about her daughter determined Frederic to visit her and make the explanation which he felt it his duty to make, for he knew he had given her some reason to think he intended asking her to be his wife. He accordingly feigned some excuse for going to New Haven, and one morning found himself at the door of the house where Isabel was stopping.

"Give her this," he said, handing his card to the servant, who carried it at once to the delighted young lady.

"Frederic Raymond," read Isabel. "Oh, yes. Tell him I'll be down in a moment," and she proceeded to arrange her hair a little more becomingly and to make several changes in her dress, so that the one moment was nearly fifteen ere she

started for the parlor, where Frederic was rather dreading her coming, for he scarcely knew what he wished to say.

Half timidly she greeted him, as a bashful maiden is supposed to meet her lover, and seating herself at a respectful distance from him, she asked numberless questions concerning his health, her numberless friends in Kentucky, her mother, and dear little Alice, who, she presumed, did not miss her much.

"Your mother's presence reminds us of you very often, of course," returned Frederic, "but you know we can get accustomed to almost anything, and Alice seems very happy."

"Yes," sighed Isabel. "You will all forget me, I suppose, even to mother—but for me, I have never been quite contented since I left Kentucky. I thought it tiresome to teach, and perhaps was sometimes impatient and unreasonable, but I have often wished myself back again. I don't seem to be living for anything now," and Isabel's black eyes studied the pattern of the carpet quite industriously.

This long speech called for a reply, and Frederic said: "You would not care to come back again, would you?"

"Why, yes," returned Isabel; "I would rather do that than nothing."

For a time there was silence, while Frederic fidgeted in his chair and Isabel fidgeted in hers, until at last the former said:

"I owe you an explanation, Isabel, and I have come to make it. Do you remember our conversation in the parlor, and to what it was apparently tending, when we were interrupted by Alice?"

"Yes," replied Isabel, "and I have thought of it so often, wondering if you were in earnest, or if you were merely trifling with my feelings."

"I certainly had no intention of trifling with you," returned Frederic; "neither do I know that I was really in earnest. At all events it is fortunate for us both that Alice came in as she did"; and having said so much, Frederic could now look calmly upon a face which changed from a serene summer sky to a dark, lightning-laden thunder-cloud as he told her the story he had come to tell.

In her terrible disappointment, Isabel so far forgot herself as to lose her temper entirely, and Frederic, while listening to her as she railed at him for what she called his perfidy, wondered how he ever could have thought her either womanly or good.

He arose to go, saying to her as he reached the door: "I did not come here to quarrel with you, Bell, I wish still to be

your friend, and if you are ever in trouble, come to me as to a brother. Marian will, I trust, be with me, then; but she will be kind to you, for 'tis her nature."

"Plague on that Marian," was Isabel's unladylike thought as the door closed after Frederic. "I wonder how many times she's coming to life! How I wanted to charge him with his meanness in marrying her fortune, but as that is a secret between the two, he would have suspected me of treachery. The villain! I believe I hate him—and only to think how those folks in Kentucky will laugh. But it's all Agnes' doings. She inveigled more out of me than there was to tell, and then repeated it to suit herself. The jade! I hope she's happy with that old man"—and at this point Isabel broke down in a flood of tears, in the midst of which the door bell rang again, and hurrying up the stairs she listened to the names, which this time were "Mr. and Mrs. Rivers"—Agnes and her husband—and they asked for her.

Drying her tears, and bathing her eyes until the redness was gone, Isabel went down to meet the "tattling mischief-maker," embracing her very affectionately, and telling her how delighted she was to see her again, and how well she was looking.

"Then why do you not embark on the sea of matrimony yourself, if you think it such a beautifier," said Agnes.

"Me?" returned Isabel with a toss of her head; "I thought I wrote you that I had given up that foolish fancy."

"Indeed, so you did," said Agnes, "but I had forgotten it, and when I saw Mr. Raymond at the Tontine, where we are stopping, I supposed, of course, he had come to see you, and I said to Mr. Rivers it was really too bad, for from what he said at our wedding I fancied there was nothing in it, and had made up my mind to take you with us to Florida, as I once talked of doing. Husband's sister wants a teacher for her children, don't she, dear?"

Mr. Rivers was about to answer in the affirmative, but ere he could speak Isabel chimed in: "Oh, you kind, thoughtful soul. Let me go with you now; do. Nothing could please me more. I have missed your society so much, and am so unhappy here!" and in the black eyes there was certainly a tear, which instantly touched the heart of the sympathetic old man, who anticipated his wife's reply, by saying: "Certainly you shall go, if you like. You'll be company for Mrs. Rivers, and if I am in my dotage, as some say, I've sense enough to know that she can't be contented all the time with her grand-

father. Eh, Aggie?" and he chucked his bride under the chin.

"Disgusting!" thought Isabel.

"Old fool!" thought Agnes, who was really rather pleased with the idea of having Isabel go with her to her new home, for though she did not love her dear friend, she rather enjoyed her company, and she felt that anybody was acceptable who would stand as a third person between herself and the grandfather she had chosen.

The more she thought of the plan the better she was pleased with it, and before parting the whole was amicably adjusted. Early in October, Isabel was to join her friend in Kentucky, and go with her from thence to Florida, where she was either to remain with Mrs. Rivers, or to teach in the family of Mrs. McGregor, Mr. Rivers' sister.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOVERNESS

It was a bright September afternoon, and the dense foliage of the trees looked as fresh and green as when watered by the summer showers, save here and there a faded leaf came rustling to the ground, whispering to those at whose feet it fell of the winter which was hastening on, and whose breath even now was on the northern seas. Softly the autumnal sunlight fell upon the earth, and the birds sang as gayly in the trees as if there were no hearts bereaved—no small, low rooms where all was darkness and gloom—no humble procession winding slowly through the crowded streets and out into the country, where, in a new-made grave, a mother's love was buried, while the mourners, two in number, a young man and a girl, held each other's hand in token that they were bound together by a common sorrow.

For many days that window had been darkened, just as it was when Marian Grey lay there with the fever in her veins; but it was open now, and the west wind came stealing in, purifying the room from the faint, sickening smell of coffins and death, for the Destroyer had been there. And when the mourners came back from that grave in the country, one threw himself upon the lounge, and burying his face in the cushions, sobbed aloud:

"Oh, Marian, it's terrible to be an orphan and have no mother."

"Yes, Ben, 'tis terrible," and Marian's tears dropped on the hair of the honest-hearted Ben.

Up to this hour he had restrained his grief, but now that he was alone with Marian, he wept on until the sun went down and the night shadows were creeping into the room. Then, lifting up his head, he said: "It is so dark—so dismal now—and the hardest of all is the givin' up our dear old home where mother lived so long, and the thinkin' maybe you'll forget me when you live with that grand lady."

"Forget you! Oh, Ben, I never can forget how much you have done for me, denying yourself everything for my sake," said Marian, while Ben continued: "Nor won't you be ashamed of me, neither, if I should come sometimes to see

you? I should die if I could not once in a while look into your eyes; and you'll let me come, won't you, Marian?"

"Of course I will," she replied, continuing after a moment: "It is not certain yet that I go to Mrs. Sheldon's. I have not answered her last letter because— You know what we talked about before your mother died?"

"Yes, yes, I know," returned Ben, "but I had forgot it—my heart was so full of other things. I'll go out there tomorrow. I'd rather you should teach at Riverside, even if you'd never heard of Frederic, than go to that grand lady, who might think, because you was a governess, that you wan't fit to live in the same house."

"I have no fears of that," said Marian. "Mrs. Harcourt says she is an estimable woman; but still I, too, would rather go to Riverside, if I were sure Frederic would not know me. Do you think there is any danger?"

"No," was Ben's decided answer, and in this opinion Marian herself concurred, for she knew that within the last two years she had changed so much that none who saw her when first she came to Mrs. Burt's would recognize her now.

About three months before the night of which we are writing, she had been graduated at Mrs. Harcourt's school with every possible honor, both as a musician and a scholar. There had never been her equal there before, Mrs. Harcourt said, and when her friend, Mrs. Sheldon, who lived in Springfield, Mass., applied to her for a family teacher, she warmly recommended her favorite pupil, Marian Grey, frankly stating, however, that she was of humble origin—that her adopted mother or aunt was a poor sewing woman, and her adopted brother a peddlar. This, however, made no difference with Mrs. Sheldon, and several letters had passed between herself and Marian, who would have accepted the liberal offer at once, but for a lingering hope that Ben would carry out his favorite plan, and procure her a situation as teacher at Riverside. She had forgotten what she had once said about learning to hate Frederic, and the possibility of living again beneath the same roof with him made her heart beat faster than its wont. She had occasionally met him in the streets, and once she was sure his eye had rested upon her in passing, but she knew by its expression that she was not recognized, and when Ben suggested offering her services as Alice's governess, she readily consented.

During the two years Ben had not lost sight of Frederic's movements, though it so chanced that they had met twice, once just after the receipt of Alice's picture, which had been

greeted by Marian with a shower of kisses and tears, and once the previous autumn, when Frederic was about returning to Kentucky, for with his changed feelings toward Marian, Mr. Raymond felt less delicacy in using her money—less aversion to Redstone Hall, where his presence was really needed, for a portion of the year at least, and which he intended making his winter residence.

But he was at Riverside now, and Ben was about going there to see what arrangements could be made, when his mother's sudden death caused both himself and Marian to forget the subject until the night after the burial, when, without a moment forgetting the dead or the dreary blank her absence made, they talked together of the future, and decided that on the morrow Ben should go to Riverside and see if there were room in Frederic's house for Marian Grey. The morrow came, and at an early hour Ben started, bidding Marian keep up her spirits, as he was sure of bringing her good tidings.

Frederic was sitting in his armchair, which stood near the window, just where Marian had placed it two years and a half ago. Not that it had never been moved since that April morning, for, freed from old Dinah's surveillance, Mrs. Huntington, who was still at Riverside, proved herself a pattern housekeeper, and the chair had probably been moved a thousand times to make room for the broom and brush, but it was in its old place now, and Frederic was sitting in it, thinking of Marian and his hitherto fruitless efforts at finding her. He was beginning to get discouraged, and still each time that he went to the city he thought, "Perhaps I may meet her today," and each night, as the hour of his return drew near, Alice waited upon the piazza when the weather was fine, and by the window when it was cold, listening intently for another step than Frederic's—a step which never came, and even Alice grew less hopeful, while Marian seemed farther and farther away as month after month went by bringing no tidings of her. Frederic knew that she must necessarily have changed somewhat from the Marian of old, for she was a woman now, but he should readily recognize her, he said. He should know her by her peculiar hair, if by no other token. So when his eye rested on a face of surpassing sweetness, shaded by curls of soft chestnut hair, which in the sunlight wore a rich red tinge, he felt a glow like that which one experiences in gazing for a single instant on some picture of rare loveliness; then the picture faded, the graceful figure glided by, and there was nothing left to tell how, by stretching forth his hand, he might have grasped his long-lost Marian. Moments there were

when she seemed near to him, almost within his reach, and such a moment was the one when Mrs. Huntington announced Ben Butterworth, whom he had not seen for a long time.

Involuntarily he started up, half expecting his visitor had come to tell him something of her. But when he saw the crape upon Ben's hat, and the sorrow on his face, he forgot Marian in his anxiety to know what had happened.

"My mother's dead," said Ben, and the strong man, six feet high, sobbed like a little child, bringing back to Frederic's mind the noiseless room, the oddly-shaped box, the still, white face, and tolling bell, which were all he could distinctly remember of the day when he, too, said to a boy like himself: "My mother's dead."

Those three words. Alas, how full of anguish is their utterance, and how their repetition will call up an answering throb in the heart of everyone who has ever said in bitterness of grief: "My mother's dead!"

Frederic felt it instantly, and it prompted him to take again the rough hand, which he pressed warmly in token of his sympathy.

"He is a good man," thought Ben, wiping his tears away; and after a few choking coughs and brief explanations as to the cause and time of her death, he came at once to the object of his visit.

"He should peddle now just as he used to do, of course, but wimmen wan't so lucky, and all Marian could do was to teach. He had given her a tiptop larnin', though she had earnt some on't herself by sewin'. She had got a paper thing, too, with a blue ribbin, from Miss Harcourt, who praised her up to the skies! In short, if Mr. Raymond had not any teacher for Alice, wouldn't he take Marian Grey?" and Ben twirled his hat nervously, while he waited for the answer.

"I wish you had applied to me sooner," said Frederic, "for in that case I would have taken her, but a Mrs. Jones, from Boston, came on only a week ago, so you see I am supplied. I am very sorry, for I feel an interest in Miss Grey, and will use my influence to procure her a situation."

"Thank you; there's a place she can have, but I wanted her to come here," returned Ben, who was greatly disappointed, and began to cry again.

Frederic was somewhat amused, besides being considerably disturbed, and after looking at the child-man for a moment, he continued:

"Mrs. Jones is engaged for one year only, and if at the end

of that time Miss Grey still wishes to come, I pledge you my word that she shall do so."

This brought comfort at once. One year was not very long to wait, and by that time Marian would certainly be past recognition, and as all Ben's wishes and plans centered upon one thing, to wit: Mr. Raymond's falling in love with his unknown wife, he was readily consoled, and wiping his eyes, he said apologetically, as it were: "I'm dreadful tender-hearted, and since I've been an orphan it's ten times wuss. So you must excuse my actin' like a baby. Where's Alice?"

Frederic called the little girl, who, child-like, waited to put on her bracelet, "so as to show the man that she still wore it and liked it very much." She seemed greatly pleased at meeting Ben again, asking him why he had not been there before, and if he had received her picture.

"Yes, wee one," said he, taking her round, white arm in his hand and touching the bracelet. "I should of writ, only that ain't in my line much, and I don't always spell jest right, but we got the picter, and Marian was so pleased she cried."

"What made her?" asked Alice wonderingly. "She don't know me."

"But she knows you're blind, for I told her," was Ben's quick reply, which was quite satisfactory to Alice, who by this time had detected a note of sadness in his voice, and she asked what was the matter.

To her, also, Ben replied: "My mother's dead," and the mature little girl understood at once the dreary loneliness that mother's death must bring even to the heart of a big man like Ben. Immediately, too, she thought of Marian Grey, and asked: "What she would do?"

"I came out to see your pa—no, beg your pardon—to see if the square didn't want her to hear you say your lessons," was Ben's answer, and Alice exclaimed: "Oh, Frederic, let her come. I know I shall like her better than Mrs. Jones, for she's young and pretty, I am sure. May she come?"

"Alice," said Frederic, "Mrs. Jones has an aged mother and two little children dependent upon her earnings, and, should I send her away, the disappointment would be very great. Next year, if we all live, Miss Grey shall come, and with this you must be satisfied."

Alice saw at once that he was right, and she gave up the point, merely remarking that "a year was a heap of a while."

"No, 'tain't," said Ben, who each moment was becoming more and more reconciled to the arrangement.

One year's daily intercourse with fashionable people, he

thought, would be of invaluable service to Marian, and as he wished her to be perfect both in looks and manners when he presented her to Frederic Raymond, he was well satisfied to wait, and he returned to New York with a light, hopeful heart. Marian, on the contrary, was slightly disappointed, for, like Alice, a year seemed to her a long, long time. Still, there was no alternative, and she wrote immediately to Mrs. Sheldon that she would come as early as the first day of October. It was hard to break up their old home, but it was necessary, they knew, and with sad hearts they disposed of the furniture, gave up the rooms, and then, when the time appointed came, Marian started for her new home, accompanied by Ben, who went rather unwillingly.

"We ain't no more alike than ile and water," he said, when she first suggested his going, "and they won't think so much of you for seein' me."

But Marian insisted, and Ben went with her, mentally resolving to say but little, as by this means, he fancied, "he would be less likely to show how big a dolt he was!"

CHAPTER XVII

WILL GORDON

MRS. SHELDON'S residence was a most beautiful spot, reminding Marian a little of Redstone Hall, and as she passed up its nicely graveled walk and stepped upon its broad piazza, she felt that she could be very happy there, provided she met with sympathizing friends. Any doubts she might have had upon this subject were speedily dispelled by the appearance of Mrs. Sheldon, in whose face there was something very familiar; and it was not long ere Marian identified her with the lady who had spoken so kindly to her in the car between Albany and New York, asking her what was the matter, and if she had friends in the city. This put Marian at once at her ease, and her admiration for her employer increased each moment, particularly when she saw how gracious she was to Ben, who, true to his resolutions, scarcely spoke except to answer Mrs. Sheldon's question, and to decline her invitation to dinner.

"I should never get through that in the world without some blunder," he thought, and as the dinner bell was ringing, he took his leave, crying like a child when he parted with Marian, who was scarcely less affected than himself.

Going to the depot, he sauntered into the ladies' room, where he found a group of young girls, who were waiting the arrival of a friend, and who, meantime, were ready for any fun which might come up. Ben instantly attracted their attention, and one who seemed to be the leader of the party, began to quiz him, asking "where he lived, and if he had ever been so far from home before?"

Ben understood the drift of her remarks at once, and with imperturbable gravity replied:

"I come from Down East, where they raise sich as me, and this is the fust time I was ever out of Tanton, which allus was my native town!"

Then, taking his tobacco box from his pocket, he passed it to an elegant-looking man, whom he readily divined to be the brother of the girl, saying to him:

"Have a chaw, captain? I'd jest us lief you would as not."

As he heard the loud laugh which this speech called forth, he continued, without the shadow of a smile:

"I had—'strue's I live, for I ain't none o' your tight critters. Nobody ever said that of Ben Bur—Ben Butterwith," he added hastily, for until Marian was discovered to Frederic, he thought it best to retain the latter name.

"Ben Butterworth," repeated the young girl aside to her brother. "Why, Will, didn't Sister Mary tell us that was the adopted brother or cousin of her new governess? You know Miss Grey mentioned his name in one of her letters."

"Yes, sir," said Ben, ere Will had time to reply. "If by Mary you mean Miss Sheldon, I'm the chap. Brought my sister there today, to be her schoolma'am, and I don't want you to run over her neither, 'cause you'll be sorry bimeby. That was all gammon I told you about never being away from home before, for I've seen considerable of the world."

The cars from Boston were by this time rolling in at the depot, and, without replying to Ben's remark, the young lady went out to look for her friend.

That night, just after dark, Mrs. Sheldon's door bell rang, and her brother and sister came in, the latter dressed in the extreme of fashion, and bearing about her an air which seemed to indicate that she had long been accustomed to receive the homage of those around her. Seating herself upon the sofa, she began: "Well, Mary, Will and I have come over to see this wonderful prodigy. Mother was here, you know, this afternoon, and she came home half wild on the subject of Miss Grey, insisting that I should call directly, and so, like a dutiful daughter, I have obeyed, though I must confess that the sight of Ben Butterworth, whom we met at the depot, did not greatly prepossess me in her favor."

"They are not at all alike," said Mrs. Sheldon, "neither are they in any way related. Miss Grey is highly educated, and has the sweetest face I ever saw. She has some secret trouble, too, I'm sure, and she reminds me of a beautiful picture over which a veil is thrown, softening, and at the same time heightening its beauty."

"Really," said Will, rousing up, "some romance connected with her. Do bring her out at once."

Mrs. Sheldon left the room, and going up to Marian's chamber, knocked at the door. A low voice bade her come in, and she entered just in time to see Marian hide away the photograph of Frederic, at which she had been looking.

"My brother and sister are in the parlor and have asked for you," she said.

"I will come down in a moment," returned Marian, who wished a little time to dry her tears, for she had been weeping over the pictures of Frederic and Alice, both of which were in her possession.

Accordingly, when Mrs. Sheldon was gone, she bathed her face until the stains had disappeared; then smoothing her collar and brushing her wavy hair, she descended to the parlor, where Ellen Gordon sat prepared to criticize, and William Gordon sat prepared for almost anything, though not for the vision which greeted his view when Marian Grey appeared before him.

The dazzling purity of her complexion contrasted well with her black dress, and the natural bloom upon her cheek was increased by her embarrassment, while her eyes drooped modestly beneath the long-fringed lashes, which Ellen noticed at once, because they were the one coveted beauty which had been denied to herself.

"Jupiter!" was Will's mental comment. "Mary didn't exaggerate in the least, and Nell will have to yield the palm at once."

Something like this passed through Ellen's mind, but though on the whole a frank, right-minded girl, she was resolved upon finding fault with the stranger, simply because her mother and sister had said so much in her praise.

"She is vulgar, I know," she thought, and she watched narrowly for something which should betray her low birth, but she waited in vain.

Marian was perfectly ladylike in her manners; her language was well chosen; her voice soft and low; and ere she had been with her half an hour, Ellen secretly acknowledged her superiority to most of the young ladies of her acquaintance, and she half regretted that she, too, had not been educated at Mrs. Harcourt's school, if such manners as Miss Grey's were common there.

At Mrs. Sheldon's request, Marian took her seat at the piano, and then Ellen hoped to criticise; but here again she was at fault, for Marian was a brilliant performer, keeping prefect time, and playing with the most exquisite taste.

As she was turning the leaves of the music book after the close of the first piece, Will said to his sister:

"By the wall, Nell, I had a letter from Fred today, and he says he will be delighted to get you that music the first time he goes to the city."

Marian started just as she had done that afternoon when Mrs. Sheldon called her youngest boy Fred. Still, there was

no reason why she should do so. Frederic was a common name, and she kept on turning the leaves, while Ellen replied: "What else did he write, and when is he going South?"

Marian's hand was stayed now, and she listened eagerly for the answer, which was "Sometime in November, and he has invited me to go with him, but I hardly think I shall. He's lonesome, he says, and can find no trace of his runaway wife. So, there's the shadow of a chance for you, Nell."

The hand, which held the leaf suspended, came down with a crash upon the keys of the piano, but Ellen thought it was an accident, if she thought of it at all; and she replied: "Fie, Will, just as though I would have a man before I knew for certain that his wife was dead. I admire Mr. Raymond very much, and if he had not been so foolish as to marry that child, I can't say that he would not have made an impression, for he is the finest-looking and most agreeable gentleman I ever met. Isn't it strange where that girl went, and what she went for? Hasn't he ever told you anything that would tend to explain it?"

Up to this point Marian had sat immovable, listening eagerly and wondering where these people had known Frederic Raymond. Then, as something far back in the past flashed upon her mind, she turned, and looking in the young man's face, knew who he was and that they had met before. His name had seemed familiar from the first, and she knew that he was the Will Gordon who had been Frederic's chum in college, and had once spent a vacation at Redstone Hall. He had predicted that she would be a handsome woman, and Frederic had said she could not with such hair. She remembered it all distinctly, but any effect it might then have had upon her was lost in her anxiety to hear the answer to Ellen's question.

"Fred generally keeps his matters to himself, but I know as much as this: He didn't love that Miss Lindsey any too well when he married her, but he has admitted to me since that his feelings toward her had undergone a change, and he would give almost anything to find her. He is certain that she was with him when he was sick in New York, and since that time he has sought for her everywhere."

William Gordon had no idea of the effect his words produced upon the figure which, on the music stool, sat as motionless as if it had been a block of marble. During all the long, dreary years of her exile from her home, there had not come to her so cheering a ray of hope as this, and the bright bloom deepened on her cheek, while the joy which danced in

her deep blue eyes made them look almost black beneath the heavy lashes. Frederic was beginning to love her—he had acknowledged as much to Mr. Gordon, and her heart bounded forward to the time when she should see him face to face, and hear him tell her so with his own lips. Little now she heeded Ellen's next remark: "I presume it would be just the same even if he were to find her. He is a great admirer of beauty, and she, I believe, was very ordinary looking."

"Not remarkably so," returned Will. "She was thin-faced and had red hair, but I remember thinking she might make a handsome woman—"

"With red hair! Oh, Will!" and the black-tressed Ellen laughed at the very idea.

A sudden movement on Marian's part made Will recollect her, and he hastened to apologize for his apparent forgetfulness of her presence.

"You will please excuse us," he said, "for discussing an affair in which you, of course, can have no interest."

"Certainly," she replied, while around the corners of her mouth were little laughing dimples, which told no tales to the young man, who continued: "Will you give us some more music? I admire your style of playing."

Marian was in a mood for anything, and turning to the piano she dashed off into a merry, spirited thing, to which Will's feet kept time, while Ellen looked on amazed at the white fingers which flew like lightning over the keys, seemingly never resting for an instant upon any one of them, but lighting here and there with a rapidity she had never before seen equaled. It was the outpouring of Marian's heart, and the tune she played was a song of jubilee for the glad tidings she had heard. Ere she had half finished, Will Gordon was at her side, gazing wonderingly into her face, which sparkled and glowed with her excitement.

"She is strangely beautiful," he thought, and so he said to Ellen when they were walking home together.

"She looks very well," returned Ellen, "but I trust you will not feel it your duty to fall in love with her on that account. Wouldn't it be ridiculous, though, for you, who profess never to have felt the least affection for any woman, to yield at once to Mary's governess?"

Will Gordon was older than Frederic Raymond, and an examination of the family Bible would have shown him to be thirty. Quite a bachelor, his sister Ellen said, and she marveled that he had lived thus long without taking to himself a wife. But Will was very fastidious in his ideas of females,

and though he had traveled much, both in Europe and his own country, he had never seen a face which could hold his fancy for a moment, until the sunny, blue eyes of Marian Gray shone upon him and thawed the ice which had laid about his heart so many years. Even then he did not quite understand the feeling, or know why it was that night after night he found himself locked out at home, while morning after morning his sister Ellen scolded him for staying out so late, wondering what attraction he could find at Mary's when he knew as well as she that he would never disgrace the Gordon family by marrying a governess, and a peddler's adopted sister, too! Will hardly thought he should either. He didn't quite know what ailed him, and in a letter written to Frederic, who was now in Kentucky, he gave an analysis of his feelings, after having first told him that Marian Grey was the adopted sister of a Yankee peddler, who had once visited Redstone Hall, and who, he was sure, Frederic would remember for his oddities.

"I wish you could see this girl," he wrote; "I'd like your opinion, for I know you are a connoisseur in everything pertaining to female charms, but I am sure you never in all your life saw anything like Marian Grey. I never did, and I have seen the proudest court beauties in Europe—but nobody like her. And yet it is not so much the exceeding fairness of her complexion, or the perfect regularity of her features, as it is the indescribably fascinating something which demands your pity as well as your admiration. There is that about her mouth, and in her smile, which seems to say that she has suffered as few have ever done, and that from this suffering she has risen purified, beautified, and if I may be allowed a term which my good mother would call wicked in the extreme, glorified, as it were!

"Just picture to yourself a graceful, airy figure, five feet four inches high—then clothe it in black, and adapt every article of dress exactly to her form and style, then imagine a rosebud face, which I cannot describe, with the deepest, saddest, brightest, merriest, sunniest, laughing blue eyes you ever saw. You see there is a slight contradiction of words, but every one by turns will apply to her eyes of blue. Then her hair—oh, Frederic, words fail me here. It's a mixture of everything—brown, black, yellow, and red. Yes, red—I mean it, for it has decidedly a reddish hue in the sunshine. By gaslight it is brown, and by daylight a most beautiful chestnut or auburn—rippling all over her head in glossy waves, and curling about her forehead and neck."

This letter reached Frederic one rainy afternoon, when he

had nothing to do but to read it, laugh over it, reflect upon and answer it. Will Gordon's description of Marian Grey thrilled him with a strange feeling of pleasure, imperceptibly sending his thoughts after another Marian, and involuntarily he said aloud: "If she had been like this picture Will has drawn, I should not be here so lonely and desolate."

Frederic Raymond was prouder far than Will Gordon, and his feelings at first rebelled against his friend's taking for a bride the sister of unpolished, uneducated Ben. "But it is his own matter," he said; "I see plainly that he is in love, so I will write at once and tell him what is the 'trouble.'"

CHAPTER XVIII

WILL'S WOOING

THE silver tea set and damask cloth had been removed from Mrs. Gordon's supper table. The heavy curtains of brocatelle were dropped before the windows; a cheerful fire was burning in the grate, for Mrs. Gordon eschewed both furnaces and stoves; the gas burned brightly in the chandeliers, casting a softened light throughout the room, and rendering more distinct the gay flowers on the carpet. The lady-mother, a fair type of a thrifty New England woman, had donned her spectacles, and from a huge pile of socks was selecting those which needed a near acquaintance with the needle, and lamenting over her son's propensity of wearing out his toes!

The son, meantime, half lay, half sat upon the sofa, listlessly drumming with his fingers, and feeling glad that Ellen was not there, and wondering how he should begin to tell his mother what he so much wished her to know.

"I should suppose she might see it," he thought, "might know how much I am in love with Marian, for I used to be always talking about her, and now I never mention her, it makes my heart thump so if I try to speak her name. Nell will make a fuss, perhaps, for she thinks so much of family; but Marian is family enough for me. Mary likes her, and I guess mother does. I mean to ask her."

"Mother?"

"What, William?" and the good lady ran her hand into a sock with a shockingly large rent in the heel.

No woman can be very gracious with such an opening prospect, and, as Will saw the scowl on his mother's face, he regretted that he had spoken at this inauspicious moment.

"I'll wait till she finds one not quite so dilapidated as that," he thought, and when the question was repeated, "What, William?" he replied, "Is Nell coming home tonight?"

"I believe so. I wish she was here now to help me, for I shall never get these mended. What makes you wear out your socks so fast?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, unless it's beating time to Miss

Grey's lively music. Don't she play like the mischief, though?"

Mrs. Gordon did not answer, and Will continued:

"Mother, how would you like to have me marry and settle down?" Will continued, after a moment's silence, and his mother replied:

"Well enough, provided I liked your wife."

"You don't suppose I'd marry one you didn't like, I hope."

Taking Frederic's letter from his pocket he passed it to his mother, asking her to read it, and give him her opinion of its contents.

"You know I never can make out Mr. Raymond's writing," said Mrs. Gordon, "so pray read it yourself."

But this Will could not do, and he insisted until his mother took the letter and began to read.

"Have you spoken to Marian?" she asked, giving him back the letter, but not resuming her work.

"No," was his answer, and she continued:

"Then I wouldn't."

"Why not?" he asked, in some alarm; and with a tremor in her voice, his mother replied:

"I've nothing against Marian, but we are so happy together, and it would kill me to have you go away."

"You charming woman," cried Will, kissing his mother, whose consent he understood to be fully won.

He knew she had always admired Miss Grey, but he expected more opposition than this, and in his delight he would have gone to see Marian at once, were it not that he had heard she was absent that evening. For an hour or more he talked with his mother of his plans, and when at last Ellen came in she, too, was let into the secret. Of course, she rebelled at first, for her family pride was very strong, and the peddler Ben was a serious objection. But when she saw how earnest her brother was, and that her mother, too, had espoused his cause, she condescended to say:

"I suppose you might do worse, though folks will wonder at your taste in marrying Mary's governess."

"Let them wonder, then," said Will. "They dare not slight my wife, you know," and then he drew a pleasing picture of the next summer, when his mother, Marian, Ellen, and he would visit the White Mountains and Montreal.

"Why not go to Europe?" suggested Ellen. "Mr. Sheldon talks of going in August, and if you marry this girl, you may as well go. too."

"Well spoken for yourself, little puss," returned Will; "but it's a grand idea, and I'll make arrangements with Tom as soon as I have seen Marian."

It was a long night to Will, and the next day longer still, for joyful hope and harrowing fears tormented his mind, and when at last it was dark, and he had turned his face toward Mr. Sheldon's, he half determined to go back. But he didn't, and with his usual easy, off-hand manner, he entered his sister's sitting room. Though bound to secrecy, Ellen had told the news to Mrs. Sheldon, who, of course, had told her husband; and soon after Will's arrival, the two found some excuse for leaving him alone with Marian Grey.

Marian like William Gordon very much—partly because he was Frederic's friend, and partly because she knew him to be a most affectionate brother and dutiful son—two rare qualities in a traveled and fashionable man.

She was always pleased to see him, and she welcomed him now as usual, without observing his evident embarrassment when at last they were alone. There were no stockings to be darned, and he did not know how to commence, until he remembered Frederic's letter. It had helped him with his mother—it might aid him now—and after fidgeting a while in his chair, he said:

"I heard from Mr. Raymond yesterday."

"Indeed!" and Marian's voice betrayed more interest than the word would indicate.

"He wrote that you were engaged to him—"

"I engaged to Frederic Raymond!" And Marian started so suddenly that she pulled her needle out from the worsted garment she was knitting.

"Engaged to teach, I mean," returned Will. "I'll show you what he wrote when you pick up those stitches."

"What did Mr. Raymond write of me?" Marian asked, as if only slightly interested.

"I'll show you just a little," and Will pointed out the sentence commencing with "Give my respects to Miss Grey," etc.

The sight of the well-remembered handwriting affected Marian sensibly; but when she came to the last part, and began to understand to what it all was tending, her head grew dizzy and her brain whirled for a moment. Then an intense pity for Will Gordon filled her soul, for looking upward she met the glance of his eyes, and saw therein how much she was beloved.

"No, no, Mr. Gordon!" she cried, putting her hands to her ears as he began to say: "Dear Marian." "You must not call

me so; it is wicked for you to do it—wicked for me to listen. I am not what I seem."

Her not being what she seemed, he fancied might refer to something connected with her birth, and he hastened to assure her that no circumstance whatever could change his feelings, or prevent him from wishing her to be his wife.

"Won't you, Marian?" he said, holding her in his arm so she could not escape. "I have never loved before. I always said I could not, until I saw you; and then everything was changed. I have told my mother, darling, and Ellen, too. They are ready to receive you, if you will go. Look at me, and say you will come to my home, which will never again be so bright to me without you. Won't my darling answer me?" he continued, while she sobbed so violently as to render speaking impossible. "I am sorry if my words distressed you so," he added, resting her head upon his bosom, and fondly smoothing her hair.

"I am distressed for you," Marian at last found voice to say. "Oh, Mr. Gordon, I should be most wretched if I thought I had encouraged you in this! But I have not, I am sure. I like you very, very much, but I cannot be your wife!"

"Marian, are you in earnest?" And on Will Gordon's manly face was a look never seen there before.

He did not know until now how much he loved the beautiful young girl he held so closely to his side. All the affections of his heart had centered themselves, as it were, upon her, and he could not give her up. She had been so kind to him—had welcomed him ever with her sweetest smile—had seemed sorry at his departure—and was not this encouragement? He had taken it as such, and ere she could reply to the question:

"Are you in earnest?" he added:

"I have thought, from your manner, that I was not indifferent to you, else I had never told you of my love. Oh, Marian, if you desert me now, I shall wish that I could die!"

Marian struggled until she released herself from his embrace, and, standing before him, she replied:

"I never dreamed that you thought of me, save as a friend, and if I have encouraged you, it was because—you reminded me of another. Oh, Mr. Gordon, must I tell you that long before I came here, I had learned to love some other man—hopelessly, it is true, for he does not care for me; but that can make no difference. Had I never seen him—never known of him—I might—I would have been your wife, for I know that you are noble and good; but 'tis too late—too late!"

He did not need to ask her now if she were in earnest; for,

looking up into her truthful, clear, blue eyes, he knew there was no hope for him, and bowing his head upon the arm of the sofa, he groaned aloud, while the heaving of his chest showed how much he suffered, and how manfully he strove to keep his feelings down. Mournfully Marian gazed upon him, wishing she had never come there, if by coming she had brought this hour of anguish to him. Half timidly she laid her hand upon his head, for she wished to comfort him; and, as he felt the touch of her fingers, he started, while an expression of joy lighted up his face, only to pass away again as he saw the same unloving look in her eyes.

"If I could comfort you," she said, "I would gladly do it; but I cannot. You will forget me in time, Mr. Gordon, and be as happy as you were before you knew me."

He shook his head despairingly. "No one could forget you; and the man who stands between us must be a monster not to requite your love. Who is he, Marian, or is it not for me to know?"

"I would rather you should not—it can do no good," was Marian's reply; and then Will Gordon pleaded with her to think again ere she told him so decidedly no. She might outlive that other love. She ought to, certainly, if 'twere a hopeless one; and if she only gave him half a heart, he would be content until he won the whole. They would go to Europe in autumn; and beneath the sunny skies of Italy she would learn to love him, he knew. "Won't you, Marian?" and in the tone of his voice there was a world of eager, fearful, yearning love.

"I can't—I can't; it is utterly impossible!" was the decided answer; and, without another word, Will Gordon arose and passed, with a breaking heart, from the room he had entered so full of hope and pleasing anticipations.

All this trouble and excitement wore upon Marian, and after a time she became too ill to leave her room, where she kept her bed, sometimes fancying it all a dream—sometimes resolving to tell the people who she was, and always weeping over the grief she had brought to William Gordon, who, during her illness, showed how noble and good he was by caring for her as tenderly as if she had indeed been his promised bride.

One night, toward the last of March, as he sat with his mother in the same room where he first told her of his love for Marian Grey, the door-bell rang, and a moment after, to his great surprise, Frederic Raymond walked into the room. William had forgotten what his friend had said about the pos-

sibility of his coming North earlier than usual, and he was so much astonished that for some moments he did not appear like himself.

"You know I wrote that business might bring me to Albany," said Frederic, "and that if I came so far I should visit you."

"Oh, yes, I remember now," returned William, the color mounting to his forehead, as he recalled the nature of the last letter written to Frederic, who, from his manner, guessed that something was wrong, and forbore questioning him until they retired to their room for the night.

"Fred," said William, after they had talked a while on indifferent subjects, "Fred," and Will's feet went up into a chair, for even a man who has been refused feels better with his heels a little elevated, "Fred, it's all over with me; and it makes no difference now whether the sun rises in the east or in the west."

"I suspected as much," returned Frederic, "from your failure to write and from the length of your face. What is the matter? You didn't coax hard enough, I reckon, and I shall have to undertake it for you. How would you like that? I dare say I should be more successful," and Frederic's smile was much like the Frederic of other days, when he and Will were college friends together.

"I said everything man could say, but the chief difficulty is that she doesn't love me, and does love another," returned Will, at the same time repeating to his companion as much of his experience as he thought proper.

"A discouraging beginning, I must confess," said Frederic, "but perhaps she will relent."

"No, she won't," returned Will; "she is just as decided now as she was that night. I have exhausted all my persuasion, mother has coaxed, so has Mary, so has Nell, and all to no purpose. Marian Grey can never be my wife. If it were not for this other love, though, I would not give it up."

"Who is the favored one?" Frederic asked, and his friend replied:

"Some rascal, I dare say, for she says it is a hopeless attachment on her part, and that makes it all the worse. Now, if I knew the man was worthy of her, I should not feel so badly. If it were you, for instance, or somebody like you, I'd try to be satisfied, knowing she was quite as well off as she would be with me," and Will's feet went up to the top of the chair as he thought how magnanimous he would be were it Frederic Raymond who was beloved by Marian Grey.

"I am sorry for you," said Frederic, "sorry that you, too, must walk under a cloud, as I am doing. We little thought, when we were boys, that we should both be called to bear a heavy burden; but thus has it proved. Mine came sooner than yours, and it seems to me 'tis the harder of the two to bear."

"Fred, you don't know what you are saying. Your grief cannot be as great as mine, for I love Marian Grey as man never loved before; and when she told me 'no,' and I knew she meant it, I felt as if she were tearing out my very heart-strings. You acknowledge that you never loved your wife; but you married her for—I don't know what you married her for—"

"For money!" And the words dropped slowly from Frederic's lips.

"For money?" repeated Will. "She had no money—this Marian Lindsey. She was a poor orphan, I always thought. Will you tell me what you mean?"

"I have never told a living being why I made that girl my wife," said Frederic; "but I can trust you, I know, and I have sometimes thought I would feel better if someone shared my secret. Still, I would rather not explain to you how Marian was the heiress of Redstone Hall, for that concerns the dead; but heiress she was, not only of all that, but of all the lands and houses said to belong to the Raymonds' estate in Kentucky; not a cent of it was mine; and, rather than give it up, I married her without one particle of love—married her, too, when she did not know of her fortune, but supposed herself dependent upon me."

"If you knew that she was dead, would you marry Isabel?" asked Will. And Frederic replied:

"Never!"

Then, in a reverent tone, as if speaking of one above him in purity and innocence, he told how the little blind girl had stood between him and temptation, holding up his hands when they were weakest, and keeping his feet from falling.

"But that desire is over. I can look Isabel Huntington calmly in the face, and experience no sensation, save that of relief, to think I have escaped her. With the legacy left her by Mr. Rivers, and the little means her mother had, she bought a small house near Riverside; so I shall have them for neighbors every summer. But I do not care. I have no love now for Isabel. It all died out when I was sick, and centered itself upon that little sweet-faced girl, who, I know, was Marian, though I cannot find her. If I could, Will, I'd will-

ingly part with every cent of money I call mine, and work for my daily bread. Labor would not seem a hardship, if I knew that when my toil was done, there was a darling wife waiting for me at home."

CHAPTER XIX

THE BIRTHDAY

Mrs. Gordon's breakfast bell rang several times next morning ere the young men made their appearance, for, as a natural consequence, the late hours of the previous night had been followed by protracted slumbers. As they were making their hasty toilet, Frederic said to Will:

"This is Marian's twentieth birthday."

"Is it possible!" returned Will. "It seems but yesterday since I saw her, a little girl in pantalets, with long curls streaming down her back."

When breakfast was over, the young men started for a walk downtown, going by Mrs. Sheldon's house, of course, although it was entirely out of their way; but neither thought of this, and they passed it on the opposite side of the street, so that Will could, unobserved, point out Marian's room to Frederic.

"That's it," he said, "the one with the blinds open. There she has often sat, I suppose, thinking of the villain who stands between me and happiness. The rascal! I tell you, Fred, I wish I had him as near to me as you are!" And Will Gordon fancied how, in such a case, he would treat a man who did not love Marian Grey.

Frederic made no answer, for his eyes were fixed intently upon the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of one who was fast becoming an object of interest even to him; but he looked in vain, for Marian had not yet arisen. Pale, weary, and weak, she reclined among her pillows, her fair hair falling about her face in beautiful disorder, and her eyes turned also toward the window—not because she knew that Frederic was looking in that direction, but because the morning sun was shining there, and she was watching it as it danced upon the curtain of bright crimson.

"I have seen the suns of twenty years," she thought, "and I am growing old so fast. I wonder if Frederic would know me now?"

At this moment Mrs. Sheldon came in, and advancing toward the window, looked down into the street. Catching a view of her brother and his friend, she exclaimed:

"Frederic Raymond! I wonder when he came?"

"What!—where—who is it?" Marian asked quickly, at the same time raising herself upon her elbow, and looking wistfully in the direction Frederic had gone.

"Mr. Raymond, Will's friend, from Kentucky," returned Mrs. Sheldon. "He must have come last night," and as little Fred just then called to her from without, she left the room.

When she was alone, Marian buried her face in the bedclothes, and murmured:

"Oh, if I could only see him! I long so to test his powers of recognition, and see if he would know me."

She almost hoped he would, and so claim her for his wife, as this, she fancied, might cure Will Gordon sooner than aught else which could be done. She was sure they would talk of her, for Frederic had bidden Will propose, and he would naturally ask the result of that proposal. Will would say she had refused him because she loved another, and would not something whisper to her husband that "the other" was himself—that Marian Grey was his Marian—the Marian of Redstone Hall—and he would come to her that very day, perhaps, and all the morning she waited anxiously for a step she was certain she would know, though it might not be as elastic and bounding as of old, ere she had trammeled it with a heavy weight. She listened nervously for the full, rich tones, asking for her, in the parlor below. But she listened in vain, and the restless excitement brought on a severe headache, which rendered it impossible for her to leave the room, even if he came. This Mrs. Sheldon greatly lamented, for she had invited the young men to tea, and while accepting her invitation, Will had asked if Miss Grey would not be able to spend a part of the evening with them.

"She is to be Fred's governess, you know," he said, "and he naturally wishes to make her acquaintance."

This request Mrs. Sheldon made known to Marian, who asked, eagerly, if "tomorrow would not do as well?"

"It might," returned Mrs. Sheldon, "were it not that he leaves on the early train."

When alone again with Will, in the chamber of the latter, Frederic broached the subject, asking his companion if he thought there was any probability of Miss Grey's disappointing him.

"I mean to write her a note," he said, and sitting down by Will's writing desk he took up a sheet of gilt-edged paper and commenced, "My dear Marian."

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, "what am I thinking about?" and

tearing up the sheet he threw it into the grate and commenced again, addressing her this time as "Miss Grey."

He considered her services engaged to himself, he said, and should expect her at Riverside early in September. She could come sooner if she liked, for Mrs. Jones was to leave the first of August.

"That Europe trip may tempt her," he thought, and he added: "I am glad to learn from Mrs. Sheldon that you are so proficient in German and French, for I have serious thoughts of visiting the Old World myself ere long, and as Alice, of course, will go with me, we shall prize your company all the more on account of these accomplishments."

This note he gave to Will, who said: "Perhaps I shall try again, and if I succeed, I suppose you will give her up to me."

"Yes," answered Frederic, "I'll give way for Will Gordon's wife, but for no one else," and there the conversation ceased concerning Marian Grey; nor was it resumed again, for early the next morning he started for New York, as he intended stopping at Riverside ere he returned to Kentucky.

True to his trust, Will gave the note to Marian the first time he met her, after she was well enough to come downstairs as usual.

"It is from Mr. Raymond," he said, and Marian's face was scarlet as she took it and looked into his eyes with an eager, searching glance, to see if he knew her secret.

But he did not, and with spirits which began to ebb, she broke the seal and read the few brief lines, half smiling as she thought how very formal and businesslike they were. But it was Frederic's handwriting, and when sure Will did not see her she pressed it to her lips.

"What you do that for?" asked little Fred, whose sharp eyes saw everything not intended for him to see.

"Sh—sh," said Marian; but the child persisted. "Say, what you tiss that letter for?"

Will Gordon was standing with his back to her, but at this strange question, he turned quickly and fastened his eyes on Marian's face, as if he would fathom her inmost soul.

"There's something there," she said, passing the note again over her lips as if she would brush the "something" away.

This explanation was wholly satisfactory to Fred, who, with childish simplicity asked: "Did you get it?"

But Will was not quite certain, and for several days he puzzled his brain with wondering whether Marian Grey really did kiss Frederic Raymond's note or not. If so, why did she?

Very rapidly the spring passed away, enlivened once by a

short visit from Ben, who, having purchased an entire new suit of clothes for the occasion, looked and appeared unusually well, talking but little until he was alone with Marian, when his tongue was loosed, and he told her all he had to tell.

He had been to Riverside, he said, and Mrs. Russell, who was still there and was to be the future housekeeper, was very gracious to him on account of his being the adopted brother of their next governess, Miss Grey.

"She showed me your chamber," said he, "and it's the very one they fixed up so nice for Isabel. Nobody has ever used it, for Miss Jones slep' in a little room at the end of the hall. Frederic has had a door cut from Alice's chamber into yourn, 'cause he said how't you and she would want to be near to each other, he knew. And I tell you what, when you git there, it seems to me you'll be as nigh heaven as you'll ever git in this world. Mrs. Huntington has bought a little cottage close by Frederic's," he continued, "and she's livin' there with Isabel, who has got to be an heir—"

"An heiress!" repeated Marian. "Whose, pray?"

"Don't know," returned Ben, "only that old man she went to Florida with is dead, and he willed her some. I don't know how much, but law, she'll spend it in no time."

Once Marian thought to tell him of William Gordon's unfortunate attachment, particularly as he was loud in his praises of the young man; but upon second reflections she decided to keep that matter to herself, hoping that the subject would never be mentioned to her again.

Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon were going to Europe. They would sail in about two weeks, and as Marian had positively declined to accompany them, they had engaged another governess, who was to meet them in New York. It was decided that Marian should remain a few days with Mrs. Gordon, and then go to Riverside, where her coming was anxiously expected both by Frederic and Alice. This arrangement was highly satisfactory to Will, who anticipated much happiness in having her wholly to himself for a week. There would be no Sister Ellen, with curious, prying eyes, for she was going with Mrs. Sheldon as far as New York—no little girl always in the way—no funny Fred, to see and tell everything—nobody, in short, but his good mother, whom he knew would often leave him alone with Marian.

During his absence from home he had thought much upon the subject, and had resolved to make one more trial at least. She might be eventually won, and if so, he should care but little for the efforts made to win her. With this upon his

mind, he felt rather relieved than otherwise when the family at last were gone, and Marian was an inmate of his mother's house. Both Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon had urged him to accompany them, and he had made arrangements to do so in case he found Marian still firm in her refusal. They were intending to stop for a few days in New York, and he could easily join them the day on which the boat was advertised to sail. He should know his fate before that time, he thought, and he strove in various ways to obtain an interview with Marian, who, divining his intention, was unusually reserved in her demeanor toward him, and if by chance she found herself with him alone, she invariably framed some excuse to leave the room, so that Will began at last to lose all hope, and to think seriously of joining his sister as the surest means of forgetting Marian Grey.

"She does not care for me," he said to his mother, one night after Marian had retired. "I believe she rather dislikes me than otherwise. I think on the whole I shall go, and if so, I must start in the morning, for the vessel sails tomorrow night."

To this his mother made no objection, for though she would be very lonely without him, she was accustomed to rely upon herself, so she rather encouraged him than otherwise, thinking it would do him good. Accordingly, next morning, when Marian came down to breakfast, she was surprised to hear of Will's intended departure.

Breakfast being over, there remained to Will but half an hour, and as a part of this was necessarily spent with the servants, and in preparations for his journey, he had at the last but a few moments in which to say his farewell words to Marian. She was in the back parlor, his mother said, and there he found her weeping, for she felt that her friends were leaving her one by one, and though in a few days she was going back to her husband and her home, she knew not what the result would be. Will's sudden determination to visit Europe affected her unpleasantly, for she felt that she was in some way connected with it, and she was conscious of a feeling of loneliness such as she had not experienced before since she first came to Mrs. Sheldon's.

"Are you weeping?" asked Will, when he saw her with her head bowed down upon the arm of the sofa.

Marian did not answer, and with newly awakened hope Will drew nearer and seated himself beside her.

"It might be that he was mistaken, after all," he thought. "Her tears would seem to indicate as much. Girls were

strange beings, everybody said," and passing his arm around the weeping Marian, he whispered: "Do you like me, then?"

"Yes, very, very much," she answered, "and now that you are going away, and I may never see you again, I am so sorry I ever caused you a moment's pain."

"I needn't go, Marian," William said, drawing her close to him, "I will stay, oh, so gladly, if you bid me do so. But it must be for you. Shall I, Marian? May I stay?"

And again Will Gordon poured into her ears deep, burning words of love—entreating her to be his wife—to forget that other love so unworthy of her, and to give herself to him, who would cherish her so tenderly. Then he told her how the thought that she did not love him had made him go away, when he would so much rather remain where she was, if he could know she wished it.

"Answer me, Marian," he said, "for time hastens, and if you tell me no, I must be gone. Never man loved and worshiped his wife as I will love and worship you. Speak, and tell me yes."

Will paused for her reply, and, looking into her face, which she had turned toward him, he thought he read a confirmation of his hopes; but the first words she uttered wrung his heart with cruel disappointment.

"I cannot be your wife," she said. "I mean it, Mr. Gordon —I cannot; and, oh, it would be wicked not to tell you. Can I trust you? Will you keep my secret safe, as I have kept it almost six long years?"

There was some inseparable barrier between them, and William Gordon felt it, as, trembling in every limb, he answered:

"Whatever you intrust to me shall not be betrayed."

"Then listen," she said, "and say if you will bid me marry you. I told you I was not what I seemed, and I am not. People, perhaps, call me young, but to myself I seem old; I have suffered so much, and all my womanhood has been wasted, as it were, in tears. I told you once that before coming here I had given to another the love for which you sued, and I told you truly; but, Mr. Gordon, there was more to tell; that other one, who loves me not, or who, if he does, has never manifested it to me by word or deed, is my own husband!"

"Oh, Marian, Marian, this is indeed death itself!" groaned Will, for, though she had said there was no hope, it seemed to him now that he had never believed or realized it, as when he heard the dreadful words—"my own husband."

"Do not despise me for deceiving you," Marian continued. "If I had thought you could have seen aught to desire in me—a poor, humble girl, I might, perhaps, have warned you in time, though how could I tell you, a stranger, that I was an unloved wife?"

"Where is he—that man?" Will asked, for he could not say "your husband," and his lips quivered with something akin to the pain one feels when he hears the cold earth rattling into the grave where he has buried his fondest pride.

Marian's confession was a deathblow to all Will had dared to hope, and he asked for the husband more as a matter of form than because he really cared to know.

"Mr. Gordon," said Marian, rising to her feet and standing with her face turned fully toward him, "must I tell you more? I thought I needed only to speak of a husband and you would guess the rest. Don't you know me? Have we never met before?"

Wistfully, anxiously, William gazed at her, scanning her features one by one, while a dim vision of something back in the past floated before him, but assumed no tangible form, and, shaking his head, he answered:

"Never to my knowledge."

"Look again. Is not my face a familiar one? Did you never see it before? Not here—not in New England—but far away, where the summer comes earlier and the winter is not so long. Is there not something about me—something about my person, or my voice, which carries you back to an old house on the river where you once met a little curly-haired girl?"

She did not need to say more. Little by little it had come to him, and, starting to his feet, he caught her hand, exclaiming:

"Great Heaven! The lost wife of Frederic Raymond!"

"Yes," she answered, "the lost Marian of Redstone Hall," and leaning her head upon his arm, she burst into tears, for he seemed to her like a brother now, while she to him—

He could not think of her as a sister yet—he loved her too well for that; but still his feelings toward her had changed in the great shock with which he recognized her. She could never be his Marian, he knew, neither did he desire it. And for a moment he stood speechless, wholly overwhelmed with astonishment and wonder. Then he said:

"Marian Raymond, why are you here?"

"Why!" she repeated bitterly. "You may well ask why. Hated by him who should care for me, what could I do but

go away into the unknown world and throw myself upon its charities, which in my case have not been cold or selfish. Heaven bless the noble-hearted Ben, and the sainted woman, his mother, who didn't cast me off when I went to them, homeless, friendless, and heartbroken."

In her excitement Marian clasped her hands together, and the blue of her eyes grew deeper, darker, as she paid this tribute of gratitude to those who had been her friends indeed. Involuntarily, Will Gordon, too, responded to the words:

"God bless the noble-hearted Ben," for, looking at the beautiful girl before him, he felt that what she was she owed to the self-denying, unwearied efforts of the uncultivated but generous Ben.

"Marian," he said again, "you must go home. Go to your husband. He is waiting for you. He has sought for you long; he has expiated his sin. Go, Marian, go—"

"I am going," she answered, "and if I only knew he wanted me—wanted his wife—"

"He does want you," interrupted Will. "He has told me so many a time."

Marian was about to reply, when Mrs. Gordon appeared, warning her son that the carriage was at the door; and with a hurried farewell to Marian and his mother, Will hastened off, whispering to the former:

"I shall write to you when on the sea—"

"And keep my secret safe. I would rather divulge it myself," she added.

He nodded in the affirmative, and was soon on his way to the depot, so bewildered with what he had heard that he scarcely knew whether it were reality or a dream. Gradually, however, it became clear to him, and he remembered many things which confirmed the strange story he had heard.

Greatly he wished to write to Frederic and tell him that Marian Grey was his wife, but he would not break his promise, and he was wondering how he could hasten the discovery, when, as the cars left the depot at Hartford, a broad hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice which sounded familiar, said:

"Wall, captain, bein' we're so full, I guess you'll have to make room for me, or else I'll have to set with that gal whose hoops take up the hull concern."

"Ben Butterworth!" Will exclaimed, turning his face toward the speaker, who recognized him at once.

"Wall," he began, as he took the seat Will readily shared

with him, "I didn't s'pose 'twas you. How do you do, and how's Marian? Has she gone to Riverside yet?"

"No," returned Will, and looking Ben directly in the face, he continued: "How much of Miss Grey's history do you know?"

"Mor'n I shall tell you, I'll bet. How much do you know?" and Ben set his hat a little more on one side of his head.

"More than you suppose, perhaps," returned Will. "And if you, too, are posted, I'd like to talk the matter over; but if not, I shall betray no secrets."

"I swan, I b'lieve you do know," said Ben. "Did she tell you?"

Will nodded, and Ben continued:

"She wrote to me that you knew Mr. Raymond, and liked him, too; I guess he ain't a very bad chap, after all, is he?"

The ice was fairly broken now, and both Will and Ben settled themselves for a long conversation. Will did not think it betrayed Marian's confidence to talk of her with one who understood her affairs so much better than himself, and, ere they reached New York, he had heard the whole story—heard how Ben had stumbled upon her in New York, and taken her to his home without knowing aught of her, except that she was friendless and alone—how the mother, now resting in her grave, had cared for the orphan girl, and how Ben, too, had done for her what he could.

"'Twan't much, anyway," he said, "and I never minded it an atom, for 'twas a pleasure to 'arn money for her schoolin'."

And Ben spoke truly, for it never occurred to him that he had denied himself as few men would have done—toiling early and late, through sunshine and storm, wearing the old coat long after it was threadbare, and sometimes, when peddling, eating but two meals a day, by way of saving for Marian. Of all this he did not speak to his companion. He did not even think of it, or, if he did, he felt that he was more than paid in seeing Marian what she was. Accidentally, he said that his name was really Ben Burt, and that he should be glad when the time came for him to be called thus again.

"When will that be?" asked Will, and Ben replied by unfolding to him his long-cherished plan of having Frederic make love to his own wife.

"You might write to him, I s'pose," he said, "but that would spile all my fun, and I'd rather let the thing work itself out. He's bound to fall in love with her. He can't help it, and I don't see how you could. Mabby you did," and Ben's gray

eyes looked quizzically at his companion, who colored deeply as he replied merely to the first part of Ben's remark.

"I certainly will not interfere in the matter, though before meeting you I was wondering how I could do so, and not betray Marian's confidence. I am sure now it will all come right at last, and you ought to be permitted to bring it around in your own way, for you have been a true friend to her, and I dare say she loves you as a brother."

This was touching Ben on a tender spot, for his old affection for Marian was not quite dead yet, and Will's last words brought back to him memories of those dreary winter nights, when in his way he had battled with the love he knew he must not cherish for Marian Grey. He fidgeted in his seat, got up and looked under him, sat down again, and looked out of the window, and repeated to himself a part of the multiplication table by way of keeping from crying.

"Bless her, she's an angel," he managed at last to say, adding, as he met the inquiring glance of Will: "It's my misfortin' to be oncommon tender-hearted, and when I git to thinkin' of somethin' that concerns nobody but me, I can't keep from cryin' no way you can fix it," and two undeniable tears rolled down his cheeks and dropped from the end of his nose.

"He, too," sighed Will Gordon, and as he thought how much more the uncouth man beside him had done for Marian Grey than either Frederic or himself, and that he really had the greatest claim to her gratitude and love, his heart warmed toward Yankee Ben as to a long-tried friend, and he resolved to leave for him a substantial token of his regard.

"Why don't you settle down as a grocer in some small country town?" he asked as they came near the city.

"I have thought of that," said Ben, "for I'm gettin' kinder tired travelin' now that their ain't no home for me to go once in so often. I think I should like to be a groceryman first rate, and weigh out saleratus and bar soap to the old women. Wouldn't they flock in, though, to see me, I'm so odd! But 'tain't no use to think on't, for I hain't the money now, though mabby I shall have it bimeby. My expenses ain't as great as they was."

By this time they had reached the depot, and Will, who knew they must part there, said to him:

"How long do you stay in New York?"

"Not long," returned Ben. "I've only come to recruit my stock a little."

"Go to the post office before you leave," was Will's reply, as he stepped from the platform and was lost in the crowd.

"What did he mean?" thought Ben. "Nobody writes to me but Marian, and I ain't expectin' nothin' from her, but I guess I may as well go."

Accordingly, the next night, when Will Gordon, with little Fred in his arms, was looking out upon the sea, Ben wended his way to the office, inquiring first for Ben Butterworth and then for Ben Burt. There was a letter for the latter, and it contained a draft for three hundred dollars, together with the following lines:

"You and I have suffered alike, and in each of our hearts there is a hidden grave. I saw it in the tears you shed when talking to me of Marian Grey. Heaven bless you, Ben Burt, for all you have been to her. She is one of the fairest, best of God's creation, but she was not meant for you nor me; and we must learn to go our way without her. You have done for her more, perhaps, than either Mr. Raymond or myself would have done in the same circumstances, and thus far you are more worthy of her esteem. You will please accept the inclosed as a token that I appreciate your self-denying labors for Marian Grey. Use it for that grocery we talked about, if you choose, or for any purpose you like. If you have any delicacy just consider it a loan to be paid when you are a richer man than I am. You cannot return it, of course, for when you receive it I shall be gone.

"Yours, in haste,

"WILLIAM GORDON."

This letter was a mystery to Ben, who read it again and again, dwelling long upon the words, "You and I have suffered alike, and in each of our hearts there is a hidden grave."

"That hits me exactly," he said, "though I never thought of callin' that hole in my heart a grave—but 'tain't nothin' else, for I buried somethin' in it, and the tender, brotherly feelin' I've felt for Marian ever since was the gravestun I set up in memory of what had been. But what does he know about it, though why shouldn't he, for no mortal man can look in Marian's face and not feel kinder cold and hystericky-like at the pit of his stomach! Yes, he's in love with her, and that's the way she came to tell who she was. Poor Bill! Poor Bill! I know how to pity him to a dot," and Ben heaved a deep sigh as he finished this long soliloquy.

The money next diverted his attention, but no puzzling on his part could explain to him satisfactorily why it had been sent.

"S'posin' he was grateful," he said, "he needn't give me three hundred dollars for nothin', but, bein' he has, I may as well use it to start in business, though I shall pay it back, of course," and when alone in his room at the hotel where he stopped, he wrote upon a bit of paper:

"NEW YORK, August 30, 18—.

"For vally rec. I promise to pay Bill Gordon, or bearer, the sum of three hundred dollars with use from date.

"BENJAMIN BURT."

This note he put carefully away in his old leathern wallet, where it was as safe and as sure of being paid as if it had been in William Gordon's hands instead of his.

Meantime Marian at Mrs. Gordon's was half regretting that she had told her secret to William, and greatly lamenting that they had been interrupted ere she knew just how much Frederic wished to find her. That his feelings toward her had changed, of course, she was sure, but she would know by word and deed that he loved her ere she revealed herself to him, and the dark mystery of that cruel letter must be explained before she could respect him as she had once done. And now but a few days remained ere she should see him face to face, for she was going to Riverside very soon. Some acquaintances of hers were going West by way of New York, and she decided to accompany them, though by so doing she would reach Riverside one day earlier than she was expected.

"It would make no difference, of course," she said, and she waited impatiently for the appointed morning.

It came at last, and long before the hour of starting she was ready, the dancing joy in her eyes, and her apparent eagerness to go being sadly at variance with the expression of Mrs. Gordon's face, for the good lady loved the gentle girl and grieved to part with her.

"I am sorry to leave you," Marian said when the last moment came, "but I am so glad I am going, too; sometime, perhaps, you may know why, and then you will not blame me."

She could not shed a tear, although she had become greatly attached to her Springfield home, and her excitement continued unabated until she reached New York, where they stopped for the night. There were several hours of daylight, and, stealing away from her friends she took a Third Avenue car and went up to their old house where strangers were living now. She did not care to go in, for the dingy, uncurtained windows looked far from inviting, and she passed

slowly down the other side of the street, musing upon all that had passed since the night when she first climbed those narrow stairs, and asked a mother's care from Mrs. Burt. She did not think then that she would ever be as happy as she was today, with the uncertainty of meeting Frederic tomorrow. It seemed a great while to wait, and as Ben had once numbered the weeks in seven years, so she now counted the hours which must elapse ere she felt the pressure of Frederic's hand—for he would shake hands with her, of course, and he would look into her face, for he had heard much of her both from Will Gordon and Ben. Would he be disappointed? Would he think her pretty? Would he know her? And Alice—what would she say? Marian dreaded this test more than all the rest, for she felt that there was danger in the instinct of the blind girl. Slowly she retraced her steps, and, returning to the Hotel Astor, sought her own room, informing her friends that she was weary and would rest.

"Five hours more," was her first thought when she awoke next morning from a sounder sleep than she had supposed it possible to enjoy when under such excitement. Ere long it was four hours more, then three, then two, then one, and then the cars stopped at the depot at Yonkers. Two trunks marked "M. G." stood upon the platform, and near them a figure in black bowing to her friends who leaned from the car window, and holding in her hands a satchel, a silk umbrella, two checks, her purse, and a book, for Marian possessed the weakness of her sex, and in traveling always carried the usual amount of baggage.

"To Riverside," she said, when asked where she wished to go, and she looked about as if half expecting to see a familiar face.

But she looked in vain, and in a few moments she was comfortably seated in the lumbering stage which once before had carried her up that long hill. Eagerly she strained her eyes to catch the first view of the house; and when at last it came in sight, she was too intent upon it to observe the showily-dressed young lady tripping along upon the walk, and holding her skirts with her thumb and finger so as to show her dainty slippers.

But if Marian did not see Isabel, Isabel saw her. It was not usual for the stage to come up at that hour of the day, and as it passed her by Isabel turned to see where it was going.

"To Riverside," she exclaimed, as she saw it draw up to the gate. "It must be the new governess," and as there was no

house very near, she stopped to inspect the stranger as well as she could at that distance. "Black," she said, as Marian stepped upon the ground; "but I might have known it, for regular built teachers always wear black, I believe. She is rather tall, too. An umbrella, of course. I wonder she hasn't her blanket shawl and overshoes this hot day. Her bonnet is pretty, and that hem in her veil very wide. On the whole, she's quite genteel for a governess," and Isabel walked on while Marian went up the graveled walk, expecting at each step to meet with either Frederic or Alice.

Going up to the door she resolutely pulled the silver knob. The loud, sharp ring made her heart beat violently, and when she heard a heavy tread, not unlike a man's, coming up the basement stairs, she thought: "What if it is Frederic himself? What shall I say?"

"It is Frederic," she continued, as the step came nearer, and she was wishing she could run away and hide when the door was opened by Mrs. Russell, her feet encased in a pair of Mr. Raymond's cast-off shoes, which accounted for her heavy tread, and herself looking a little crestfallen at the sight of her visitor, whom she recognized at once.

"Miss Grey, I b'lieve?" she said, dropping a low courtesy. "We wa'n't expecting you till tomorrow; but walk in and make yourself at home. You'll want to go to your room, I s'pose. Traveled all night, didn't you? You look pale, and I wouldn't wonder if you wanted to sleep most of the day. I never thought of such a thing as your comin' this mornin'. Dear me! what shall I do?"

This was said in an undertone, but it caught the ear of Marian, who, now that she had a chance to speak, asked for Mr. Raymond timidly, as if fearful that with his name her secret might slip out.

"Bless you!" returned Mrs. Russell, "both of 'em went to New York early this morning, and won't be home till dark, maybe, and that's why I feel so. I don't know how to entertain you as they do; and Miss Alice has been reckoning on giving you a good impression. I'm so sorry you've—they've gone, I mean. I wa'n't expecting to get any dinner today, and was havin' such a nice time sewin' on my dress"; and, with the last, the whole cause of the old lady's uneasiness was divulged.

In the absence of Frederic and Alice, she had counted upon a day of leisure, which Marian's arrival had seriously interrupted.

"I beg you not to trouble yourself for me," said Marian,

who readily understood the matter. "I never care for a regular dinner—indeed I may not be hungry at all."

The old lady's face brightened perceptibly, and she replied: "Oh, I don't mind a cup of tea and the like o' that, but to brile or stew this hot day ain't so pleasant when a person is fleshy as I am. I'll get you something, though; and now you go upstairs to your room, the one at the right hand, with the white furniture and the silver jigger that lets the water into the marble dish. We live in style, I tell you; and Mr. Raymond is a gentleman, if there ever was one—only he wants meat three times a day, just as he has in Kentucky. Thinks, I s'pose, it don't hurt me any more to sweat over the fire than it does that Dinah Alice talks so much about. Yes, that's the door—right there."

CHAPTER XX

FREDERIC AND ALICE VISIT MARIAN'S OLD HOME

"FREDERIC," said Alice, about six weeks before Marian's arrival at Riverside, "who hired that Mrs. Merton to take care of you when you were sick at the hotel?"

"The proprietor, I suppose," returned Frederic.

Alice continued:

"But who told him of her?"

"I don't know," said Frederic. "She was from the country, I believe."

"Yes, yes," returned Alice; "but some person must have recommended her, and if you can ascertain who that person was, you may find Mrs. Merton, and learn something of Marian."

"I wonder I never thought of that before," said Frederic, adding, that if Alice had her sight he believed she would have discovered Marian ere this.

"I know I should," was her answer; and after a little further conversation it was decided that Frederic should go to New York and learn, if possible, who first suggested Mrs. Merton as nurse.

This was not so easy a matter as he had imagined it to be, for, though Frederic himself was well remembered at the hotel, where he was now a frequent guest, scarcely anyone could recall Mrs. Merton distinctly, and no one seemed to know how she came there, until a servant, who had been in the house a long time, spoke of Martha Gibbs, and then the proprietor suddenly remembered that she had recommended Mrs. Merton as being a friend of hers.

"But who is Martha Gibbs, and where is she now?" Frederic asked; and the servants replied that:

"Her home used to be in Woodstock, Connecticut"; and with this item of information Frederic wrote to her friends, inquiring where she was.

To this letter there came ere long an answer, saying that Mrs. John Jennings lived in ———, a small town in the interior of Iowa. Accordingly, the next mail westward from Yonkers carried a letter to said Mrs. Jennings, asking where

the woman lived who had nursed Mr. Raymond through that dangerous fever. This being done, Frederic and Alice waited impatiently for a reply, which was long in coming, for Mr. Jennings' log tenement was several miles from the post office, where he seldom called, and it was more than a week ere the letter reached him. Even then it found him so engrossed in the arrival of his first-born son and heir, that for two or three days longer it lay unopened in the clock-case, ere he thought to look at it.

"I don't know what it means, I'm sure," he said, taking it to his wife, who, having never heard of the death of her old friend, replied:

"Why, he wants to know where Mrs. Burt lives. Just write on a piece of paper: 'East ——— Street, No. ——, third story; turn to your right; door at the head of the stairs.' I wonder if he's never been there yet?"

John was not an elaborate correspondent, and he simply wrote down his better half's direction, saying nothing whatever of Mrs. Burt herself, and thus conveying to Frederic no idea that Merton was not the real name.

"A letter from Iowa," said Frederic to Alice, as he came in from the office, on the very night when Marian was walking slowly past what was once her home. "I have the street and number, and tomorrow I am going there."

"And I am going, too," cried Alice. "Won't Marian be surprised to see us both! I hope she'll come to the door herself; and, Frederic, if she does, you will kiss her, won't you, and act like you was glad, for if you don't, maybe she won't come back with us."

"I will do right," answered Frederic, adding in a low tone, "Perhaps she will not be there."

"Yes, she will," was Alice's positive reply, "or if she's not, somebody can tell us where she is. Only to think, we shall see her tomorrow. I do wish it would hurry, and I'm glad Miss Grey is not coming until the day after. It will be so nice to have them both here. Do you suppose they'll like each other, Marian and Miss Grey?"

"I dare say they will," returned Frederic, smiling at the little girl's enthusiasm, and hoping she might not be disappointed.

Anon, a shadow clouded Alice's face, and observing it, Frederic passed his hand over her hair, saying: "What is it, birdie?"

"Frederic," said Alice, creeping closely to the side of the young man, "isn't Miss Grey very beautiful?"

"Mr. Gordon and Ben say so," returned Frederic, and Alice continued:

"Don't you be angry with me, but you loved Isabel the best because she was the handsomest, and now you won't love Miss Grey better than Marian, will you, and you'll be Marian's husband right off, won't you?"

"When Marian comes here it will be as my wife," said Frederic, and with this answer Alice was satisfied.

"I wish it would grow dark faster," she said, for she could tell when it was night; and Frederic, while listening to the many different ways she conjured up for them to meet Marian, became almost as impatient as herself for the morrow, when his renewed hopes might, perhaps, be realized.

The breakfast next morning was hurried through, for neither Alice nor Frederic could eat, and Mrs. Russell, when she saw how much was left untouched, congratulated herself upon its answering for the hired man's dinner, and thus giving her a nice long time for sewing.

"It isn't a bit likely Miss Grey will come today," said Alice, as she followed Frederic to the carriage, and, confident of this, they gave Miss Grey no further thought, but went on their way in search of Marian. When they reached New York, Frederic, who had some business to transact, left Alice in the parlor at the Hotel Astor, where she sat with her face to the window, just as though she could see the passers-by; and, as she sat there, a party who were leaving glanced hastily in, all seeing the little figure by the window, and one thinking to herself: "She wears her hair combed back, as Alice used to do."

Then the group passed on, while over the face of the blind girl there flitted for an instant a wondering, bewildering expression, for her quick ear had caught the sound of a voice which it seemed to her she had heard before—not there—not in New York—but far away, at Redstone Hall. What was it? Who was it? She bent her head to listen, hoping to hear it again, but it came no more, for Marian Grey had left the house, and was passing up Broadway. It was not long ere Frederic returned, and taking Alice's hand, he led her into the street, and entered a Third Avenue car.

"We are on the right track, I think," he said, "for it was this way she went with the man described by Sarah Green."

Alice gave a sigh of relief, and, leaning against Frederic, rather enjoyed the pleasant motion of the car, although she wished it would go faster.

"Won't we ever get there?" she asked, as they plodded

slowly on, stopping often to take in a passenger, or set one down.

"Yes, by and by," said Frederic encouragingly. "I am not quite certain of the street, myself, but I shall know it when I see the name, of course"; and he looked anxiously out as he passed along. "Here it is!" he cried, at last; and, seizing Alice's arm, he rather dragged than led her from the car, and out upon the crossing.

"I've found it!" he said, as his eye caught the number; and now that he believed himself near to what he had sought so long, he was more impatient than Alice herself.

He could not wait for her uncertain footsteps, and, pale with excitement, he caught her in his arms and hurried up the narrow stairs, which many a time had creaked to Marian's tread. The third story was reached at last, and he stood panting by the door, where Mr. Jennings had said that he must stop. It was open, and the greasy, uncarpeted floor, of which he caught a glimpse, looked cheerless and uninviting, but it did not keep him back a moment, and he advanced into the room, which, by the three heads at the window, he knew was the same where the white curtain once had hung, and where now the glaring August sunlight came pouring in, unbroken and unsubdued.

At the sight of a stranger one of the heads turned toward him and a little voice said:

"Ma's out washin', she is, and won't be home till night."

There was a cold, heavy feeling of disappointment settling around Frederic's heart, for nothing there seemed at all like what he remembered of the neat, tidy Mrs. Merton, but he nerved himself to ask:

"What is your mother's name?"

"Bunce, and my pa is in the Tombs," was the reply.

"How long have you lived here?" was the next question, asked with a colder, heavier heart.

"Next Christmas a year," said the little girl, and catching Frederic's arm, Alice whispered:

"Do let's get out into the open air."

Nearly all the present tenants had moved there since Mrs. Burt's death, and none knew aught of her save one rather decent-looking woman, who said "she remembered the folks well, though they held their heads above the likes of her. She'd seen them comin' in and out and had peeked into their room, so she knew they was well to do."

"Was their name Merton, and did a young girl live with them?" asked Frederic; and the woman replied:

"Merton sounds some like it, though I'd sooner say it was Burton, or something like that. I never even so much as passed the time of day with 'em, for I tell you they felt above me; but the girl was a jewel—so trim and genteel-like."

"That was Marian," whispered Alice, and Frederic continued:

"Where are they now?"

"Bless you," returned the woman, "one on 'em is in heaven, and the Lord only knows where t'other one went to."

Alice's hand, which lay in Frederic's, was clutched with a painful grasp; and the perspiration gathered about the young man's white lips as he stammered out:

"Which one is dead? Not the girl? You dare not tell me that?"

"I dare if it was so," returned the woman; "but 'twant; 'twas the old one—the one I took to be her mother; though I have heard a story about the girl's comin' here long time ago, before I moved here. I was away when the woman died, and when I got back the room was empty, and the boy and girl was gone; nobody knows where; and I hain't seen 'em since."

There was now nothing to do but to return to the hotel. Leaving Alice there, Frederic went back again to the street and made the most minute inquiries, but all to no purpose. He could not obtain the least clew to her, and he retraced his steps with a feeling that she was as really lost to him as if Sarah Green's letter had been true and Marian resting in her grave.

"Why had that letter been written?" he asked himself again and again.

Somebody knew of Marian, and there was a mystery connected with it—a mystery of wrong, it might be. Perhaps she could not come back, even though she wanted to, and his pulses quickened with painful rapidity as he thought of all the imaginary terrors which might surround the lost one. It was indeed a sad reflection, and his spirits were unusually depressed, when just before sunset he took Alice by one hand, a basket in the other, and started for home.

"I didn't think we should come back alone," said Alice, when at last they reached the depot at Yonkers, and she was lifted into the carriage waiting for them. "It's dreadful we couldn't find her, but I'm so glad we've got her cat," and she guarded the basket carefully, as if it had contained the diamonds of India.

Frederic did not care to talk, and folding his arms, he

leaned moodily back in his carriage, evincing no interest in anything until, as they drew near home, the driver said to Alice:

"Guess who's come?"

"Oh, I don't know—Dinah, maybe," was Alice's reply; and then Frederic smiled at the preposterous idea.

"No; guess again," said the driver. "Somebody as handsome as a doll."

"Miss Grey!" cried Alice, almost upsetting her basket in her delight.

Eagerly she questioned John, and then replied:

"I'm so glad, though I was going to fix her room so nice tomorrow—but no matter, it's always pleasant up there. How lonesome she must have been all day, with nothing but the garden, the books, and the piano."

"She has been homesick, I guess," said John, "for I seen her cryin', I thought, under a tree in the garden."

"Poor thing!" sighed Alice. "She won't be homesick any more when we get there, will she, Frederic?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE MEETING

NOTWITHSTANDING Alice's fears the day had not been a long one to Marian, who had been so occupied in unpacking her trunks and in going over the house and grounds, as scarcely to heed the lapse of time, and she was surprised when, about sunset, she saw John drive from the yard, and knew he was going for his master. Not till then did she fully realize her position, and she sought her chamber to compose herself for the dreaded trial which each moment came nearer and nearer.

"Will Frederic know me?" she asked herself a dozen times, and as often answered no—but Alice, ah, Alice, there was danger to be apprehended from her, and Marian felt that she would far rather meet the scrutinizing gaze of Frederic Raymond's eyes than submit herself to the touch of the blind girl's fingers, or trust her voice to the blind girl's ear.

"I will be calm," she said, and with one tremendous effort of the will she quieted the violent throbbings of her heart, and leaning on her elbow, pretended to be reading, though not a sound escaped her ear. She heard the little feet come running up the walk, and the heavy, manly tread following in the rear.

Half rising to her feet, she waited for the first words of greeting.

"Miss Grey, I believe"; and bowing low, Frederic Raymond advanced toward Marian, who now stood up, so that the blaze of the chandelier fell full upon her, revealing at once her face and form.

Had her very life depended upon it she could not have spoken then, for the stormy emotions the name "Miss Grey" called up, mastered her speech entirely. She knew he would thus address her, but it grated harshly on her ear to hear him call her so, and her heart yearned for the familiar name of Marian, though she had no reason to expect it from him.

"You are welcome to Riverside," he continued; "and I regret that your first day here should have been so lonely."

This gave her a little time, and conquering her weakness, she extended her hand to take the one he offered. Hers was cold and clammy, and trembled like an imprisoned bird, as it

lay in his broad, warm palm. For an instant he held it there, and gazed down into her sweet, childish face, which did not look wholly unfamiliar to him, while she herself seemed more like a dear friend than a total stranger. The tie between them, which naught but death could sever, and which was bound so closely around Marian's heart, brought to his own an answering throb, and when at last she spoke, assuring him that she had not been lonely in the least, he started, for there was something in the tone which moved him as a stranger oft is moved, when hearing in the calm, still night the air of "Home, Sweet Home." It carried him back to Redstone Hall, years and years ago, when in the moonlight he played with his dusky companion upon the river brink. But Marian Lindsey had no portion of his thoughts at the first interview with Marian Grey, who ventured at last to look into his face just as he was looking into hers. Oh, how much like the Frederic of old he was, save that in his mature manhood, he was finer, nobler looking, while the proud fire of his eyes had given place to a milder, softer expression, and she felt intuitively that he was far more worthy of any woman's love than when she knew him before.

Motioning her to a chair, he, too, sat down at a little distance and conversed with her pleasantly, as friend converses with friend, asking about her journey, making inquiries after Mrs. Sheldon's family, and experiencing a most unaccountable sensation when he saw how she blushed at the mention of William Gordon. Ben was next talked about, and Marian was growing eloquent in his praise, when suddenly a sight met her view which petrified her powers of speech and sent the blood ebbing backward from her cheek and lip. In the hall without, and where Frederic could not see her, the blind girl stood, her hands clasped and tightly raised, her lips apart, her eyes rolling, her head bent forward, and her ear turned toward the door, whence came the sound which had arrested her footsteps and chained her to the spot. She had started for the parlor and come thus far, when she, too, caught the tone which had affected even Frederic, and her head grew dizzy with the bewildering sound, for to her it brought memories of Marian. Had she come? Was she there with Frederic and Miss Grey? Eagerly she waited to hear the sound repeated, wondering why Miss Grey, too, did not join in the conversation. It came again, the old, familiar strain, though tuned to a sadder note, for Marian had suffered much since last she talked with Alice, and it was perceptible even in her voice. Tighter and tighter the small hands pressed together

—lower and lower bent the head, while a shade of disappointment flitted over the face of the listening child, for this time it did not seem quite so natural as at first, and she knew, too, that 'twas Miss Grey who spoke, for her subject was Ben Butterworth.

"What is it?" asked Frederic, observing that Miss Grey stopped suddenly in the midst of a remark.

Marian pointed toward the spot where Alice stood, but ere Frederic had time to step forward, the loud ring of the bell started Alice from an attitude which, had Frederic Raymond seen it, would surely have led to a discovery.

"The little girl, she acts so singular," said Marian, thinking she must make some explanation.

"She's blind, you know," was answered in a low tone, and going toward the hall, Frederic met with Alice just as a servant opened the outer door, and a stranger entered, asking for Mr. Raymond.

"In a moment," said Frederic, and leading Alice up to Marian, he continued, "your teacher," and then left the two together.

For an instant there was perfect silence, and Marian knew the blind girl could hear the beating of her heart, while she in turn watched the wonder and perplexity written on the speaking face turned upward toward her own, the brown eyes riveted upon her, as for once they had broken from their prison walls and could discern what was before them.

Oh, how Marian longed to take the little helpless creature in her arms, to hug her, to kiss her, to cry over her, and tell her of the love which had never known one moment's abatement during the long years of their separation. But she dared not; the time was not yet, and she sat gazing at her to see if she had changed since the night when she left her sleeping so quietly in their dear old room at home. She was now nearly twelve, but her figure was so slight, and her features so child-like, that few would have guessed her more than nine, unless they judged by her mature, womanly mind. To Marian she seemed the same; and when, unable longer to restrain herself, she drew the child to her, and, kissing her forehead, said to her kindly:

"You are Alice, my pupil, I am sure. Alice what?"

"Alice Raymond"; and the sightless eyes never moved for an instant from the questioner's face.

"Are you very nearly related to Mr. Raymond?" asked Marian; and Alice replied:

"Second cousin, that's all. But he has been more than a brother to me since—since—"

The perplexed, mystified look increased on Alice's face, and her gaze grew more intense as she continued: "Since Marian went away."

There was a moment's stillness, and then the hand which hitherto had rested on Marian's lap was raised until it reached the head, where it lay lightly, very lightly; though to Marian it seemed like the weight of a thousand pounds, and she felt every hair prickle at its root when the blind girl said to her:

"Ain't you Marian?"

"Yes, Marian Grey. Didn't you know my first name?" was the answer, spoken so deliberately that Marian was astonished at herself.

There was a wavering then in the brown eyes, a quivering of the lids, and the great tears rolled down Alice's cheeks; for with this calm reply, uttered so naturally, the hope she had scarcely dared to cherish passed away, and she murmured sadly:

"It cannot be her."

"What makes you cry, darling?" asked Marian, choking back her own tears, which were just ready to flow, and which did gush forth in torrents, when Alice answered:

"Oh, I wish I wasn't blind tonight!"

This surely was a good excuse for weeping and pressing the little one to her bosom. Marian wept over her passionately for a few moments; then drying her eyes, she said:

"Why tonight more than any other time?"

"Because I want so much to see how you look," returned Alice; adding, immediately: "May I feel your face? It's the only way I have of seeing."

"Certainly," answered Marian; and the fingers wandered slowly, cautiously, over every feature, involuntarily caressing the fair, round cheek, but lingering longest on the hair—the beautiful hair—whose glossy waves were perceptible even to the touch.

"What color is it?" she asked, winding one of the curls around her finger.

"Some call it auburn, some chestnut, and some a mixture of both," was the reply, and Alice continued her investigations by mentally comparing its length with a standard she had in her own mind.

The two did not agree, for the curls she remembered were longer and far more wiry than the silken tresses of Miss Grey.

"How tall are you?" she suddenly asked, and Marian tried

to laugh, although every nerve was thrilling with fear, for she knew she was passing through a dangerous test.

"Rather tall," she replied, standing up. "Yes, very tall, some would say. Put up your hand and see."

Alice did as she requested, and her tears came faster, as she whispered, mournfully, "You're the tallest."

"Did you think we had met before?" asked Marian, and then the sobs of the child burst forth unrestrained.

Burying her face in Marian's lap, she cried: "Yes—no—I don't know what I thought, only you don't seem to me like I supposed you would. You make me tremble so, and I keep thinking of somebody we lost long ago. At first your voice sounded so natural that I 'most knew she was here, but you ain't even like her. You're taller and handsomer, I reckon, and yet there is something about you that makes my heart beat so fast. Oh, I wish I could see what it is. What made God make me blind?"

Never before had Marian heard a murmur from the lips of the unfortunate child, and it seemed to her cruel not to whisper words of comfort in her ear. But she could not do it yet, and so she kissed her tenderly, saying: "Did you love this other one so very much?"

"Yes, very, very much," was Alice's reply; "and it hurts me so to think we cannot find her."

Frederic appeared just then, telling them tea was ready.

"I am afraid you will think we keep Lent here all the year around," he said apologetically. "I was surprised to find that Mrs. Russell compelled you to fast until our return."

"It didn't matter," Marian replied; though she had wondered a little at the non-appearance of supper, for Mrs. Russell, intent upon her dress, had no idea of "makin' two fusses," and she kept her visitor waiting until the return of Frederic, saying, "the supper would taste all the better when it did come."

Very willingly Marian followed Frederic to the dining room, where everything was indicative of elegance and wealth.

"Mrs. Jones used to sit here, and I now give the place to you," said Frederic, motioning to the seat by the tea tray, and himself sitting down opposite, with Alice upon his right.

Marian became her new position well, and so Frederic thought, as he saw how gracefully her snowy fingers handled the silver urn, and how much at home she seemed. There was a strange fascination about her as she sat there at the head of his table, with the bright bloom on her cheek, and the dewy

luster in her beautiful blue eyes, which occasionally wandered toward the figure opposite, but as often fell beneath the curious gaze which they encountered. Frederic could not forbear looking at her, even though he saw that it embarrassed her—she was so fresh, so fair, so modest—while there was about her an indescribable something which he could not define, for though a stranger, as he supposed, she seemed near to him—so near that he almost felt he had a right to pass his arm around her, and kiss the girlish lips which Will Gordon had likened to a rosebud.

"Poor Will," he sighed, "he did lose a prize when he lost Marian Grey."

Involuntarily his mind went back to Redstone Hall, and to the time when another Marian sat opposite, and did for him the office this one was doing. The contrast between the two was great, but, with a nobleness worthy of the man, he thought, "Marian Grey is more beautiful, 'tis true, but Marian Lindsey was my wife."

Then he remembered the day when Isabel first sat at his board, and he had felt it a sin to look at her in all her queenly beauty. He had grown hard since then, for he could not think it wicked to look at Marian Grey, or deem it a wrong to the other one, and he feasted his eyes upon her until she arose from the table, and went away with Alice. He soon followed them into the parlor.

"Will you play for us, Miss Grey?" asked Frederic, and without a word of apology, Marian seated herself at the piano, whose rich, mellow tones aroused her enthusiasm at once, and she played more than usually well, while Alice stood by listening eagerly, and Frederic looked on, scarce heeding the stirring notes, so intent was he upon the dimpled hands which swept the keys so skillfully.

On the third finger there was a little cornelian ring, the first gift of Ben, and as he looked he felt certain he had seen that ring and those hands before. But where? He tried to recall the time and the place. Stepping forward he looked into her face, but that gave him no clew, only the ring and the hands were familiar. Suddenly he started, for he remembered the when and the where—remembered, too, that Alice, when told of the girl with the brown veil, had said to him: "Wasn't that our Marian?"

He had accepted the suggestion as a possible one then, but he doubted it now, for if that maiden were Marian Grey, it certainly could not have been Marian Lindsey. The exquisite music ceased, and ere Alice had time for a word of comment,

he asked abruptly: "Miss Grey, did you never ride in the cars with me in New York?"

The question was a startling one, but Marian's face was turned from him, and he could not see the effort she made to answer him calmly.

"I think it very probable. I have been in the cars a great many times, and with a great many different people."

"Yes, but one rainy night, more than three years ago, did not I offer you a seat between myself and the door? You wore a brown veil, and carried a willow basket, if it were you. Something about your appearance has puzzled me all the evening, and I think I must have met you before. It was on the Third Avenue cars."

Marian trembled violently, but by constantly turning the leaves of her music book she managed to conceal her agitation, and when Frederic ceased speaking she answered in her natural tone: "Now that you recall the circumstances, I believe I do remember something about it, though you do not look as that man did. I imagined he had been sick, or was in trouble," and Marian's blue eyes turned sideways to witness, if possible, the effect of her words. But she was disappointed, for she could not see how white Frederic was for a single instant, but she felt it in his voice, as he replied:

"You are right. I had been sick, and I was in great trouble."

"Wasn't that when you were looking for Marian?" Alice asked, and again the blue eyes sought Frederic's face, turning this time so that they could see it.

"Yes, I was hunting for Marian," was the answer, and the deep sigh which accompanied the words brought a thrill of joy to the Marian hunted for, and she knew now, and from his own lips, too, that he had sought for her, nay, that he was looking for her even then, when in her anger she censured him for not recognizing her.

Little by little she was learning the truth just as it was; and when, at a late hour, she bade Frederic good-night, and went to her own chamber, her heart was almost too full for utterance, for she felt that the long, dark night was over, and the dawn she had waited for so long was breaking at last around her. Intuitively, Alice, who had been permitted to sit up as long as she did, caught something of the same spirit. "It is almost as nice as if Marian really were there," she said; and she came twice to kiss her governess, while on her face was a most satisfied expression, as she nestled among her pillows and listened to the footsteps in the adjoining chamber, where Marian made her nightly toilet.

"Oh, I wish she'd let me sleep with her!" she thought. "It would be a heap more like having Marian back." And when all was still, she stepped upon the floor, and glided to the bedside of Marian, who was not aware of her approach until a voice whispered in her ear:

"May I stay here with you? I've been making believe that you was Marian—our Marian, I mean—and I want to sleep with you so much, just as I used to do with her—may I?"

"Yes, darling," was the answer, as Marian folded her arms lovingly around the neck of the blind girl, whose soft, warm cheek was pressed against her own.

And there, just as they were used to do in their old Kentucky home, ere sorrow had come to either, they lay again side by side, Marian and Alice; the one dreaming sweet dreams of the Marian come back to her again; and the other that to her the gates of Paradise were opened, and she saw the the glory shining through, just as in Frederic Raymond's eyes she had seen the glimmer of the love light which was yet to overshadow her, and brighten her future pathway.

CHAPTER XXII

LIFE AT RIVERSIDE

It was a joyful waking which came to Marian next morning, and, when fresh and glowing from her invigorating bath, she descended to the piazza, she was surprised at finding Frederic there before her, looking haggard and pale, as if the boon of sleep had been denied him. After Marian and Alice had bidden him good-night, he, too, had retired to his room, which was directly under theirs; and, sitting in his armchair, he had listened to the footsteps above, readily distinguishing one from the other, and experiencing, unconsciously, a vague, delicious feeling of comfort in knowing that the long-talked-of Marian Grey had come to him at last, and that she was even more beautiful than he had imagined her to be, from Will Gordon's glowing description. He would keep her with him, too, he said, until the other one was found, if that should ever be; and then, as the footsteps and the murmur of voices in the chamber above ceased, and all about the house was still, his heart went out after the other one, demanding of the solitude around to show him where she was—to lead him to her, so that he could bring her back to the home where, each day, he was wanting her more and more. And the solitude, thus questioned, invariably carried his thoughts to Marian Grey, whose delicate, girlish beauty had made so strong an impression upon his mind. How would the two compare? he asked. Would not the governess far outshine the wife? Would not the contrast be a painful one?

"No, no!" he said; "for, though Marian Lindsey were not as beautiful as Marian Grey, she was gentle, pure and good." And then, as he sought his pillow, he went back again in fancy to that feverish sick room, and the tender love which alone had saved him from death; while mingled with this remembrance were confused thoughts of the veiled maiden in the corner of the car—of the geranium growing in the window, and of Marian Grey, who seemed a part of everything—for, turn which way he would, her blue eyes were sure to shine upon him; and once, when, for a few moments, he fell into a troubled sleep, she said to him, "I am the Marian you seek."

Then this vision faded, and he saw a little grave, on whose humble stone was written, "The Heiress of Redstone Hall," and with a nervous start he awoke, only to doze and dream again, until at last he was glad when the dawn came stealing across the misty river and looked in at his window. The sun was not yet up when he arose, and going out upon the broad piazza, tried by walking to gain the rest the night had failed to bring. And as he walked Spotty came purring to his side, rubbing against his feet and looking into his face as if she fain would tell him, if she could, that the lost one had returned, and was safe beneath his roof.

Frederic Raymond could not be said to care particularly for cats, but there was a charm connected with this one gamboling at his feet, and he did not deem it an unmanly act to stoop down and caress it for the sake of her who had often had it in her arms.

"Can you tell me nothing of your mistress?" he said, aloud, for he thought himself alone.

Instantly the cat, whose ear had caught a sound he did not hear, bounded toward the door where Marian Grey was standing. Advancing toward her, Frederic said: "You must excuse me, Miss Grey. I am not often guilty of petting cats, but this one has a peculiar attraction for me, inasmuch as it once belonged to—to—to Mrs. Raymond," and Frederic felt vastly relieved to think he had actually spoken of his wife to Marian Grey, and called her Mrs. Raymond, too! He knew Will Gordon had told her the story, and when he saw how the color came and went upon her cheek, he fancied that it arose from the delicacy she would naturally feel in talking with him of his runaway wife. He was glad he had introduced the subject, and she could continue it or not as she chose. Marian hardly knew how to reply, for though she longed to hear what he had to say of Mrs. Raymond, she scarcely dared trust herself to question him.

At last, however, she ventured to say: "Yes; Alice told me that it was once your wife's. She is dead, isn't she?"

Frederic started, and walking off a few paces, replied: "Marian dead! not that I know of! Did you ever hear that she was?" and he came back to Marian, looking at her so earnestly that she colored deeply, as she replied:

"Mr. Gordon told me something of her; and I had the impression that—"

She did not know how to finish the sentence, and she was glad to hear a little, uncertain step upon the stairs, as that was an excuse for her to break off abruptly, and go to Alice, who

came down in quest of her, and expressed much surprise that she should arise so early and dress so quietly.

"Mrs. Jones used to make such a noise coughing and sneezing," she said, "that she always awoke me, while Isabel never got up till breakfast was ready, and sometimes not then when we were in Kentucky. Negroes were made to wait on her, she said. She'll be coming over here to call and see how you look. I heard her asking Mrs. Russell last week if you were pretty, and she said—"

"Never mind what she said," suggested Marian; adding, laughingly: "I have heard of Miss Huntington before. Will Gordon told me of her, and Ben, too. He saw her in Kentucky, you know; so you see, I am tolerably well posted in your family affairs"; and she turned toward Frederic, who was about to answer, when Alice, who had climbed into a chair, and was standing with her arm around the young man's neck, chimed in:

"If Mr. Gordon told you that Frederic liked her it isn't so, for he don't; do you, Frederic?"

"I like all the ladies," was the reply; and as the breakfast bell then rang, the conversation ceased, and they entered the house together, Alice holding fast to Marian's hand, and dancing along like a joyous bird.

"You seem very happy this morning," said Frederic, smiling down upon the happy child.

"I am," she replied. "I'm 'most as happy as I should be if we had found Marian yesterday. Wouldn't it be splendid if this were really Marian; and wouldn't you be glad?"

Frederic Raymond did not say yes—he did not say anything; but as he looked at the figure in white presiding a second time so gracefully at his table, he fancied that it would not be a hard matter for any man to be glad if Marian Grey were his wife. Breakfast being over, Alice assumed the responsibility of showing her teacher the place.

"You were here once, I know," she said, "and left me those flowers, but you hadn't time then to see half. There's a tree down in the garden, where Frederic's name is cut in the bark, and Marian Lindsey's, too. You must see that"; and she led her off to the spot where John had seen her crying the day before. "I ain't going to study a bit for ever so long. Frederic says I needn't," said Alice. "I'm going to have a right nice time with you." And Marian was not sorry, for nothing could please her better than rambling with Alice over what was once her home.

Very rapidly the first few days passed away, and ere a

week had gone by, Marian understood tolerably well the place Marian Lindsey occupied in her husband's affections, and she needed not the letter received from William Gordon to tell her that the Frederic Raymond of today was not the same from whose presence she had once fled with a breaking heart.

Alice talked a great deal about the lost Marian, and one day her teacher asked: "Did Mr. Raymond never hear from her?"

Alice replied:

"Yes, and that's the mystery. One cold March night when Isabel was dressing for a party and was just as cross as she could be, there came to him a letter from Sarah Green, saying she was dead and buried with canker-rash."

"Dead!" exclaimed Marian, starting quickly. "When? where?"

"In New York," answered Alice; and Marian listened breathlessly to the story of her supposed decease, wondering, as Frederic had often done, whence the letter came, and why it had been sent.

"It must have been a plan of Ben's to see what he would do," she thought; and she listened again, with burning cheeks and beating heart, while Alice told of Frederic's grief when he read that she was dead.

"I know he cried," said Alice, "for there were tears on his face, and he sat so still, and held me so close to him that I could hear his heart thump so hard," and she illustrated it by striking her tiny fist upon the table.

Then she told how some time after she had interrupted Frederic in the parlor, just as he was asking Isabel to be his wife, and had almost convinced him again of Marian's existence.

"Blessed Alice," said Marian involuntarily. "You have been Miss Lindsey's good angel, and kept her husband from falling."

"I couldn't help it," answered Alice. "I 'most knew she was alive; and I was so glad when he started for New York. I was sure he'd find her; and he did. She took care of him a few days and his voice sounded so low and sad when he told me of her, and how she left him when Isabel came. Your brother Ben—the nice man who gave me the bracelet—telegraphed for her to go; and you would have supposed she was crazy—she flew around so, ordering the negroes, and knocking Dud down flat, because he couldn't run fast enough to get out of her way. That made Aunt Hetty, his grandmother, mad, and she yellowed Isabel's collar that she was ironing. If I hadn't been blind I should have cried myself so, those dread-

ful days when we expected to hear Frederic was dead, for next to Marian I love him the best. He's real good to me now; and when I asked him once what made him pet me so much more than he used to, he said: 'Because our dear, lost Marian loved you, and you loved her.'"

"Did he say that? Did he call her his 'dear, lost Marian'?" and the eyes of the speaker sparkled with delight, while across her mind there flitted the half-formed resolution that before the sun had set Frederic Raymond should know the whole.

Ere Alice could answer this question, there was a loud ring at the door, and a servant brought to Miss Grey, Isabel Huntington's card.

"I knew she'd call," said Alice. "She wants to see how you look; but I don't care, for Frederic thinks you're a heap the handsomest. I asked him last night after you quit playing, and had left the room."

The knowledge that Frederic Raymond preferred her face to that of Isabel, rendered Marian far more self-possessed than she would otherwise have been, as she went down to meet her visitor, whose call was prompted from mere curiosity, and not from any friendliness she felt toward Marian Grey.

They had met before, but there was no token of recognition between them now, and as strangers they greeted each other, Marian's hand trembling slightly as she offered it to Isabel—for she knew that this was not their first meeting. Coldly, inquisitively, and almost impudently, the haughty Isabel scrutinized the graceful creature, mentally acknowledging that she was beautiful, and hating her for it. With a great effort Marian concealed her agitation, and answered carelessly the first few commonplace remarks addressed to her, as to how she liked Riverside, and if this was her first visit there.

"No," she answered to this last question, "I came here once with Ben, who, you remember, was once at Redstone Hall."

"I could not well forget him. His odd Yankee ways furnished gossip for many a day among the negroes." And Isabel tossed her head scornfully, as if Ben Burt were a creature far beneath her notice.

After a little, she spoke of Mr. Raymond, asking Marian, finally, what she thought of him, and saying she supposed she knew he was a married man.

"I know he has been married, but is there any certainty that his wife is still living?" asked Marian, for the sake of hearing her visitor's remarks.

"Any certainty! Of course there is," said Isabel, experiencing at once a pang of jealousy lest the humble Marian

Grey had dared to think of Frederic as a widower, and hence a marriageable man. "Of course she's living, though, I must say, he takes no great pains to find her. He did look for her a little, I believe, after he was sick in New York; but he did it more to divert his mind from a very mortifying disappointment than from any affection he felt for her, and it was this which prompted him to go to New York at all."

"What disappointment?" Marian asked faintly, and affecting to be embarrassed, Isabel replied:

"It would be unbecoming in me to say what the nature of it was, and I referred to it thoughtlessly. Pray forget it, Miss Grey"; and she turned the leaves of a handsomely bound volume lying on the table with well-feigned modesty.

Marian understood her at once, and she was glad that Isabel was too intent upon an engraving to observe her agitation. Notwithstanding what Alice said, Frederic had offered himself to Isabel, and her refusal had sent him to New York, where he hoped to forget his mortification, and where sickness had overtaken him. In the kindness of her heart, Isabel had come to him, and the words of affection which she had heard her speak to Frederic were prompted by pity, rather than love, as she then supposed. And after Isabel had left him, he had looked for her merely by way of excitement, and not because he cared to find her. Such were the thoughts which flashed upon Marian's mind, and destroyed at once her half-formed resolution of telling Frederic that night. She did not know Isabel, and she could not understand why she should be guilty of a falsehood to her—a perfect stranger.

Frederic had returned from the city earlier than was his custom, for he usually spent the entire day; but there was something now to draw him home besides the blind girl, and he was conscious of quickening his footsteps as he drew near his house, and of watching eagerly for the flutter of a mourning robe, or the sight of a sunny face, which, he knew, would smile a welcome.

He heard her voice in the parlor, and ere he was aware of it he stood in the presence of Isabel. Narrowly Marian watched him, marveling somewhat at his perfect self-possession; for Isabel was to him an object of such indifference that he experienced far less emotion in meeting her than in speaking to Marian Grey, and asking if she had been lonely.

"You men are so vain," said Isabel with a toss of her head, "and think we miss you so much. Now, I'll venture to say Miss Grey has not thought of you in all day. Why should she?"

"Why shouldn't she?" asked Frederic, giving to Marian a smile which sent the hot blood tingling to her finger tips.

"Why shouldn't she!" returned Isabel, "just as though we girls ever think of married men. By the way, have you heard anything definite from Mrs. Raymond, since she left you so suddenly in New York, or have you given up the search?"

Marian pitied Frederic then, he turned so white; and she almost hated Isabel, as she saw the malicious triumph in her eye. Breathlessly, too, she awaited the answer, which was:

"I shall never abandon the search until I find her, or know certainly that she is dead. I went to the place where she used to live, not long ago."

"Indeed! What did you learn?" and a part of Isabel's assurance left her, for she felt that this searching for his wife was a reality with him; while Marian's heart grew hopeful and warm again, as she listened to Frederic Raymond telling Isabel Huntington of that dear old room which had been her home so long.

"I can't conceive what made her run away," said Isabel, fixing her large, glittering eyes upon Frederic, who coolly replied, "I can," and then turning to Marian he abruptly commenced a conversation upon an entirely different subject.

Biting her lip with vexation, Isabel rose to go, saying she should expect to see Miss Grey at her own house, and that she hoped she would sometime bring Mr. Raymond with her.

"You need not be afraid to come," she continued, addressing herself to him, "for everybody knows you have a wife, consequently your coming will create no scandal concerning yourself and mother!" and with a hateful laugh she swept haughtily down the walk.

From this time forth Isabel was a frequent visitor at Riverside, where she always managed to say something which seriously affected Marian's peace of mind and led her to distrust the man who was beginning to feel far more interest in the Marian found than in the Marian lost. This the quick-sighted Isabel saw, and, while her bosom rankled with envy toward her rival, she exulted in the thought that love her as he might he dared not tell her of his love, for the barrier a living wife had built between the two. Though professing the utmost regard for Miss Grey she did not hesitate to speak against her when an opportunity occurred, but her shafts fell harmlessly, for where Marian was known she was esteemed, and the wily woman gave up the contest at last and waited anxiously to see the end.

Toward the last of October, Ben, who was now a petty

grocer in a New England village, came to Riverside for the first time since Marian's residence there. Never before had he appeared so happy, and his honest face was all aglow with his delight at seeing Marian at last where she belonged.

"You fit in like an odd scissor," he said to her when they were alone. "Ain't it 'most time to tell?"

"Not yet," returned Marian. "I would rather wait until I am back at Redstone Hall. We are going there next month, and then, too, I wish I knew how much of Isabel's insinuations to believe."

"Isabel be hanged," said Ben. "She lied, I know, and mebby that letter was some of her devilment."

Marian replied by telling him of the letter from Sarah Green, and asking if he could explain it. But it was all a mystery to him, and he puzzled his brain with it for a long time, deciding at last that it might have come from some of her Kentucky acquaintances who chanced to be in New York and sent it just for mischief.

"But they overshot the mark," said he. "You ain't dead by a great sight."

Ben went away happy over his visit, and the others were soon busy in joyful anticipations of a speedy removal to Kentucky, for Frederic was going earlier this season than usual, and the tenth of November was appointed for them to start. If they met with no delays they would reach Redstone Hall on the anniversary of Marian's bridal, and to her it seemed meet that on this day of all others she should return again to her old home, and she wondered if Frederic, too, would think of it or send one feeling of regret after his missing bride. He did remember it, for the November days were always fraught with memories of the past. This year, however, there was a difference, for though he thought much of Marian Lindsey, it was not as he had thought of her before, and he was conscious of a most unaccountable sensation of satisfaction in knowing that even if she could not go with him to Kentucky, her place would be tolerably well filled by Marian Grey!

CHAPTER XXIII

REDSTONE HALL

News had been received at Redstone Hall, that the family would be there on the thirteenth; but Frederic's coming home was a common occurrence now, and did not create as great a sensation among his servants as it once had done. Still it was an event of considerable importance, particularly as he was to bring with him a new governess, who, judging from his apparent anxiety to have everything in order, was a person of more distinction than the prosy Mrs. Jones, or even the brilliant Isabel. Old Dinah accordingly worked herself up to her usual pitch of excitement, and then, long before it was time, started off her spouse, who was to meet his master at Big Spring station, and who waited there impatiently at least an hour ere the whistle and smoke in the distance announced the arrival of the train.

"We are here at last," said Frederic, when they stopped before the depot; and he touched the arm of Marian, who sat leaning against a window, her head bent down, and her thoughts in such a wild tumult that she scarcely comprehended what she was doing or where she was.

During the entire journey she had labored under the highest excitement, which manifested itself sometimes in snatches of merry songs, sometimes in laughter almost hysterical, and again, when no one saw her, in floods of tears, which failed to cool her feverish impatience. It seemed to her she could not wait, and she counted every milestone, while her breath came faster and faster as she knew they were almost there. With a shudder she glanced at the clump of trees under whose shadow she had hidden five years before, and those who noticed her face as she passed out marveled at its deathly pallor.

Marian did not try to conceal her delight, and Frederic watched her wonderingly, as with glowing cheeks and beaming eyes she looked first from one window and then from the other, the color deepening on her face and the pallor increasing about her mouth, as waymark after waymark was passed and recognized.

"You seem very much excited," he said to her at last; and, assuming as calm a manner as possible, she replied:

"For years back the one cherished object of my life was to

visit Kentucky; and now that I am really here, I am so glad! oh, so glad!" and Frederic could see the gladness shining in her eyes, and making her so wondrously beautiful to look upon that he was sorry when the twilight shadows began to fall, and partially obscured his vision.

"There is the house," he said, pointing to the chimneys, just discernible above the trees.

But Marian had seen them first, and when as they turned a corner the entire building came in view, she sank back upon the cushion, dizzy and sick with the thoughts which came crowding so fast upon her. The day had been soft and balmy, and mingled with the gathering darkness was the yellow, hazy light the sun of the Indian summer often leaves upon the hills. The early mist lay white upon the river, while here and there a shower of leaves came rustling down from the tall trees which grew in such profusion around the old stone house. And Marian saw everything—heard everything—and when the horses' hoofs struck upon the bridge, where once they fancied she had stood and plunged into eternity, an icy chill ran through her frame, depriving her of the power to speak or move. Through the dim twilight she saw the dusky forms gathered expectantly around the cabin doors—saw the full rounded figure of Dinah on the piazza—saw the vine-wreathed pillar where five years ago that very night she had leaned with a breaking heart and wept her passionate adieu to the man who, sitting opposite to her now, little dreamed of what was passing in her mind. In a distant hemp field she heard the song some negroes sang returning from their labor, and as she listened to the plaintive music, her tears began to flow, it seemed so natural—so much like the olden time.

Suddenly as they drew nearer and the song of the negroes ceased, the stillness was broken by the deafening yell which Bruno, from his cage, sent up. His voice had been the last to bid the runaway good-by, and it was the first to welcome her back again. With a stifled sob of joy too deep for utterance she drew her veil still closer over her face, and when at last they stopped and the light from the hall shone out upon her, she sat in the corner of the carriage motionless and still.

"Come, Miss Grey," said Frederic, when Alice had been safely deposited and was folded to Dinah's bosom, "come, Miss Grey, are you sleeping?" and he touched the hand which lay cold and lifeless upon her lap. "She has fainted," he cried. "The journey and excitement have overtaxed her strength," and, taking her in his arms as if she had been a little child, he bore her into the house and up to her own

chamber, for he rightly guessed that she would rather be there when she returned to consciousness.

Laying her upon the lounge he removed her bonnet and veil, and then kneeling beside her, looked wistfully into her face which in its helplessness seemed more beautiful than ever.

"Has she come to yet?" asked the puffing Dinah, appearing at the door. "It's narves what ailed her, I reckon."

Frederic knew that his services were no longer needed, and, after glancing about the room and seeing that everything was right, he went downstairs, leaving Marian to the care of Dinah, who, as her patient began to show signs of returning consciousness, undressed her as soon as possible and placed her in the bed, herself sitting by and bathing her face and hands in camphor and cologne. The fainting fit had passed away, but it was succeeded by a feeling of such delicious languor that for a long time Marian lay perfectly still, thinking how nice it was to be again in her old room with Dinah sitting by, and once as the hard, black hand rested on her forehead, she took it between her own, murmuring involuntarily, "Dear Aunt Dinah, I thank you so much."

"Blessed lamb," whispered the old lady, "they told her my name, I 'spect. 'Pears like she's nigher to me than strangers mostly is," and she smoothed lovingly the bright hair floating over the pillow.

Twice that evening there came up the stairs a cautious step which stopped always at that door, and Dinah, as often as she answered the gentle knock, came back to Marian and said, "It's marster axin' is you any wus."

"Tell him I am only tired, not sick," Marian would say, and, turning on her pillow, she wept great tears of joy to think that Frederic should thus care for her.

The rosy dawn was just stealing into the room, next morning, when Marian awoke with a vague, uncertain feeling as to where she was, or what had happened. Ere long, however, she remembered it all; and, stepping upon the floor, she glided to the window, to feast her eyes once more upon her home. Before her lay the garden, and, though the November frosts had marred its summer glory, it was still beautiful to her; and, hastily dressing herself, she went forth to visit her olden haunts, strolling leisurely on until she reached a little summer house which had been built since she was there. Over the door were some pencil marks, in Frederic's handwriting; and, though the rains had partly washed the letters away, there were still enough remaining for her to know that "Marian Lindsey" had been written there.

"He has sometimes thought of me," she said; and she was about entering the arbor, when there arose upon the air a terrific yell, which, had she been an intruder, would have sent her flying from the spot. But she did not even tremble, and she waited fearlessly the approach of the huge creature, which, bristling with rage, came tearing down the graveled walk, his eyeballs glowing like coals of fire, and his head lowered as if ready for attack.

Bruno was still on guard, and when, in the distance, he caught a sight of Marian, he started with a lionlike bound, which soon brought him near to the brave girl, who calmly watched his coming, and, when he was close upon her, said to him:

"Good old Bruno! Don't you know me, Bruno?"

At the first sound of her voice, the fire left the mastiff's eye, for he, too, caught the tone which had once startled Alice, and which puzzled Frederic every day; still, he was not quite assured, and he came rushing on, while she continued speaking gently to him. With a bound, half playful, half ferocious, he sprang upon her, and, catching him around the neck, she passed her hand caressingly over his shaggy mane, saying to him softly:

"I am Marian, Bruno! Do you know me?"

Then, indeed, he answered her—not with a human tongue, it is true; but she understood his language well, and by the low, peculiar cry of joy he gave as he crouched upon the ground, she knew that she was recognized. Of all who had loved her at Redstone Hall, none remembered her save the noble dog, who, now as a lamb, licked her face, her hair, her hands, her dress, her feet; while all the time his body quivered with the intense delight he could not speak.

At last as she knelt down beside him, and laid her cheek against his neck, he bent his head, and gave forth a deep, prolonged howl, which was answered at a little distance by a cry of horror, and, turning quickly, Marian saw Frederic hastening toward the spot, his face pale as ashes, and his whole appearance indicative of alarm. He had been aroused from sleep by the yell which Bruno gave when he first caught sight of Marian, and ere he had time to think what it could be, Alice knocked at his door, exclaiming:

"Oh, Frederic, Miss Grey, I am sure, has gone into the garden, and Bruno is not yet secured. I heard him bark just like he did last year when he mangled black Andy so. What if he should tear Miss Grey?"

Frederic waited for no more, but, dressing himself quickly,

he hastened out, sickening with fear, as he came upon the fresh tracks the dog had made when going down the walk. He saw Marian's dress, and through the lattice he caught a sight of Bruno.

"He has her down! He is drinking her life-blood!" he thought; and for an instant the pulsations of his heart stood still, nor did they resume their wonted beat even after he saw the attitude of Marian Grey, and his terrible watchdog, Bruno.

"Marian!" he began, for he could not be formal then. "Marian! leave him, I entreat you. He is cruelly savage with strangers."

"But, I have tamed him, you see," she answered, winding her arms still closer around his neck, while he licked again her face and hair.

Wonderingly Frederic looked on, and all the while there came to him no thought that the two had met before—that the hand patting so fondly Bruno's head had fed him many a time —and that 'mid all the changes which five years had made, the sagacious animal had recognized his mistress and playmate, Marian Lindsey.

"It must be that you can win all hearts," he said, watching her admiringly, and marveling at her secret power.

Shaking back her sunny curls, and glancing upward into his face, Marian answered involuntarily:

"No, not all. There is one I would have given worlds to win, but it cast me off, just when I needed comfort the most."

She spoke impulsively, and as she spoke there arose within her the wish that he, like Bruno, might know her then and there. But he did not. He only remembered what Will Gordon had said of her hopeless attachment, and her apparent confession of the same to him smote heavily upon his heart, though why he, a married man, should care he could not tell. He didn't really care, he thought; he only pitied her, and by way of encouragement he said: "Even that may yet be won"; and while he said it, there came over him a sensation of dreariness, as if the winning of that heart would necessarily take from him something which was becoming more and more essential to his happiness.

Their conversation was here interrupted by Josh, who was Bruno's keeper, and had come to chain him for the day. Marian knew him at once, though he had changed from the short, thick lad of twelve to the taller youth of seventeen; and when, as he saw her position with Bruno, he exclaimed: "Goo-goo-good Lord!" she turned her beaming face toward

him and answered laughingly: "I have a secret for charming dogs."

Involuntarily Josh's old cloth cap came off, while over his countenance there flitted an expression as if that voice were not entirely strange to him. Touching his master's arm, and pointing to the kneeling maiden, he stammered out:

"Ha-ha-hain't I s-s-een her afore?"

"I think not," answered Frederic, and with a doubtful shake of his head, Josh attempted to lead Bruno away.

But Bruno would not move, and he clung so obstinately to Marian that she arose, and, patting his side, said playfully:

"I shall be obliged to go with him, I guess. Lead the way, boy."

With eyes protruding like saucers, Josh turned back, followed by Marian and Bruno, the latter of whom offered no resistance when his mistress bade him enter his kennel, though he made wondrous efforts to escape when he saw that she was leaving him.

"In the name of the Lord," exclaimed Hetty, shading her eyes with her hand, to be sure she was right, "if thar ain't the young lady shettin' up the dog. I never knowed the like o' that."

Then as Marian came toward the kitchen, she continued: "'Pears like I've seen her somewhar."

"Ye-ye-yes," chimed in Josh, who had walked faster than Marian. "Who-o-oo is she, Hetty?"

Marian by this time had reached the door, where she stood smiling pleasantly upon the blacks, but not daring to call them by name until she saw Dinah, who courtesied low, and coming forward asked: "Is you better this mornin'?"

"Yes, quite well, thank you. Are these your companions?" said Marian, anxious for an opportunity to talk with her old friends.

"Yes, honey," answered Dinah. "This is Hetty, and this is Lyd, and this—"

She did not finish the sentence, for Hetty, who had been earnestly scanning Marian's features, grasped her dress, saying: "Whar was you born?"

"Jest like them Higginses," muttered Dinah. "In course, Miss Grey don't want to be twitted with bein' a Yankee the fust thing."

But Hetty had no intentions of casting reflections upon the place of Marian's birth. Like Josh she had detected something familiar in the young girl's face, and twice she had

swept her hand across her eyes to clear away the mist and see if possible what it was which puzzled her so much.

"I was born a great many miles from here," said Marian, and ere Hetty could reply, Josh, whose gaze had all the time been riveted upon her, stuttered out, "Sh-sh-she is-s-s-s like M-m-m-Miss Marian."

Yes, this was the likeness they had seen, but Marian would rather the first recognition should come from another source, and she hastened to reply: "Oh, Mrs. Raymond, you mean. Alice noticed it when I first went to Riverside. You suppose your young mistress dead, do you not?"

Instantly Dinah's woolen apron was called into use, while she said: "Yes, poor dear lamb, if thar's any truth in them Scripter sayin's, she's a burnin' and a shining light in de kingdom come," and the old negress launched forth into a long eulogy in the midst of which Frederic appeared in quest of Marian.

"I am listening to praises of your wife," she said, and there was a mischievous triumph in her eye as she saw how his forehead flushed, for he was beginning to be slightly annoyed when she, as she often had done, alluded to his wife.

Why need she thrust that memory continually upon him? Was it not enough for him to know that somewhere in the world was a wife, and that he would rather hear anyone else speak of her than the bright-haired Marian Grey?

"Dinah can be very eloquent at times," he said, "but come with me to Alice. She has been sadly frightened on your account," and he led the way to the piazza, where the blind girl was waiting for them.

Breakfast being over, Marian and Alice sought the parlor, where, instead of the old-fashioned instrument which the former remembered as standing there, she found a new and beautifully carved piano.

"Frederic ordered this on purpose to please you," whispered Alice. "He said it was a shame for you to play on the other rattling thing."

This was sufficient to call out Marian's wildest strains, and, as a matter of course, the entire band of servants gathered about the door to listen, just as they once had done when the performer was Isabel. As was quite natural, they yielded their preference to the last comer, old Hetty acknowledging that even "Miss Beatrice couldn't beat that."

It would seem that Marian Grey was destined to take all hearts by storm, for ere the day was done her virtues had been discussed in the kitchen and by the cabin fire, while even the

gallant Josh, at his work in the hemp field, attempted a song, which he meant to be laudatory of her charms, but as he was somewhat lacking in poetical talent, his music ran finally into the well-known ballad of "Mary Ann," which suited his purpose quite as well.

Meantime, Marian, stealing away from Alice, quietly explored every nook and corner of the house, opening first the little box where she once had kept her mother's hair. It was there just as she had left it, and, kissing it reverently, she placed it by the side of her silken locks.

She was about to leave the room, when Frederic came in, appearing somewhat surprised to find her there, sitting in his chair as if she had a perfect right to do so. At first she was too much confused to apologize, but she managed at last to say:

"This cozy room attracted me, and I took the liberty to enter. You have a very fine library, I think; some of the books must have been your father's."

It was the books, of course, which she came to see, and sitting down opposite to her Frederic talked with her about them until she chanced to spy a portrait, put away behind the ponderous sofa, with its face turned to the wall.

"Whose is it?" she asked, directing Frederic's attention to it. "Whose is it, and why is it hidden there?"

Instantly the young man's face grew dark, and Marian trembled beneath the glance he bent upon her. Then the cold, hard look passed away and he replied:

"It is an unfinished portrait of Mrs. Raymond, taken from a daguerreotype of her when she was only fifteen. But the artist did not understand his business, and it looks even worse than the original."

This last was spoken bitterly, and Marian felt the hot blood rising in her cheeks.

"I never even told Alice of it," he continued, "but put it away in here, where I hide all my secrets."

He glanced at the private drawer—so did Marian; but she was too intent upon seeing a portrait which could look worse than the daguerreotype to heed aught else, and she said entreatingly: "Oh, Mr. Raymond, please let me see it, won't you? I lived in New York a long time, you know, and perhaps I may have met her, or even know her under some other name? May I see it?" and she was advancing toward the sofa, when Frederic seized both her hands, and holding them in his, said, half hesitatingly, half mournfully: "Miss Grey, you must excuse me for refusing your request. Poor Marian

was far from being handsome, nay, I sometimes thought her positively ugly. She is certainly so in the portrait, and a creature as highly gifted with beauty as you, might laugh at her plain features, and if you did—" He paused a moment, and Marian's eyelashes fell beneath his steady gaze. "And if you did," he continued, "I never could like you again, for she was my wife, and as such must be respected!"

Marian could not tell why it was, but Frederic's words and manner affected her painfully. She half feared she had offended him by her eagerness to see the portrait, while mingled with this was a strange feeling of pity for poor, plain Marian Lindsey, as she probably looked upon the canvas, and a deep respect for Frederic, who would, if possible, protect her from even the semblance of insult. Her heart was already full, and, releasing her hands from Frederic's, she resumed her seat, and leaning her head upon the writing desk, burst into tears, while Frederic paced the room, wondering what, under the circumstances, he was expected to do. He knew just how to soothe Alice, but Marian Grey was a different individual. He could not take her in his lap and kiss away the tears, but he could at least speak to her; and he did at last, laying his hand as near the little white one grasping the table edge as he dared, and saying very gently:

"If I spoke very harshly to you, Miss Grey, I am sorry—very sorry; I really did not intend to make you cry. I only felt that I could not bear to hear you, of all others, laugh at my poor Marian, and so refused your request. Will you forgive me?"

And by some chance, as he looked another way, his hand did touch hers, and held it, too! He did not think that an insult to the portrait at all, nor yet of the supposed original; for there was something in the way the snowy fingers twined themselves around his, which drove all other ideas from his mind, and for one brief instant he was supremely happy.

From the first he had thought of Marian Grey as a sweet, beautiful young creature, whom some man would one day delight to call his own; but the possibility of loving her himself had never occurred to him until now, when, like a flash of lightning, the conviction burst upon him that, spite of Marian Lindsey—spite of his marriage vow—spite of the humble origin which would once have shocked his pride—and spite of everything, Marian Grey had won a place in his heart from which he must dislodge her. But, how? He could not send her away, for she seemed a part of himself, and he could not live without her; but he would stifle his newborn love, he said,

and as the best means of doing so, he would talk to her often of his wife as a person who certainly had an existence, and would some day come back to him; so, when Marian replied: "I feared you were angry with me, Mr. Raymond; I would not have asked to see the portrait had I supposed you really cared," he drew his chair at a respectable distance and said: "I cannot explain the matter to you, but if you knew the whole sad story of my marriage, and the circumstances which led to it, you would not wonder that I am somewhat sensitive upon the subject. I used to think beauty the principal thing I should require in a wife, but poor Marian had none of that, and were you to see the wretched likeness, you would receive altogether too unfavorable an impression of her; for, notwithstanding her plain face, she was far too good for me."

"Do you really think so?" was Marian's eager exclamation, while close behind it was the secret struggling hard to escape, but she forced it back, until such time as she should be convinced that Frederic loved her as Marian Grey, and would hail with delight the news that she was indeed his wife.

He seemed surprised at her question, but he answered, unhesitatingly:

"Yes; far too good for me."

"And do you really wish to find her?" was Marian's next question, which brought a flush to Frederic's face, and caused him to hesitate a little ere he replied.

Yesterday he would have said yes at once, but since coming into that library he had discovered that the finding of his wife would be less desirable than before. But it should not be so. He would crush every thought or feeling which detracted in the least from his late interest in Marian Lindsey, and with a great effort he said:

"I really wish to find her"; adding, as he saw a peculiar expression flit over Marian's face: "Wouldn't you, too, be better pleased if Redstone Hall had a mistress?"

"Yes, provided that mistress were your wife, Marian Lindsey," was the ready answer; and, looking into her face, Frederic was conscious of an uneasy sensation, for Miss Grey's words would indicate that the presence of his wife would give her real pleasure.

Of course, then, she did not care for him, as he cared for her; and why should she? He asked himself this question many a time after the chair opposite him was vacant, and she had left him there alone. Why should she, when she came to him with the knowledge that he was already bound to another? She might not have liked him perhaps had he been

free; though, in that case, he could have won her love, and compelled her to forget the man who did not care for her. Taking the high-backed chair she had just vacated, he rested his elbow upon the table, and tried to fancy that Marian Lindsey had never crossed his path, and Marian Grey had never loved another. It was a pleasant picture he drew of himself were Marian Grey his wife, and his heart fairly bounded as he thought of her stealing to his side, and placing upon his arm those little soft white hands of her, while her blue eyes looked into his own, and her rosebud lips called him "Husband!" and, as he thought, it seemed to him more and more that it must one day be so. She would be his at last, and the sun of his domestic bliss would shine upon him all the brighter for the dreary darkness which had overshadowed him so long. From this dream of happiness there came ere long a waking, and burying his face in his hands he moaned aloud: "It cannot be, and the hardest part of all to bear is the wretched thought that but for my dastardly, unmanly act, it might, perhaps, have been—but now, never! never! Oh, Marian Grey! Marian Grey! I would that we had never met!"

"Frederic, didn't you hear me coming? I made a heap of noise," said a voice close to his side, and Alice's arm was thrown across his neck.

She had heard all he was saying, but she did not comprehend it until he muttered the name of Marian Grey, and then the truth flashed upon her.

"Poor Frederic," she said soothingly, "I pity you so much, for though it is wicked, I am sure you cannot help it."

"Help what?" he asked, rather impatiently, for this one secret he hoped to bury from the whole world, but the blind girl had discovered it readily, and she answered unhesitatingly:

"Can't help loving Marian Grey. I've been fearful you would," she continued, as he made no reply. "I did not see how you could well help it, either, she is so beautiful and good, and every night I pray that if our own Marian is really dead, God will let us know."

This was an entire change in Alice. Hitherto she had pleaded a living Marian—now she suggested one deceased, but Frederic repelled the thought at once.

Marian was not dead, he said, and though he admired Miss Grey, he had no right to love her. He didn't intend to, either, and if Alice had discovered anything, he trusted she would forget it.

And this was all the satisfaction he would give the little

girl, who, feeling that he would rather be alone, turned away, leaving him again with his unhappy thoughts.

That night he joined the young girls in the parlor and compelled himself to listen while Marian made the old walls echo with her ringing, merry music. But he would not look at her, nor watch her snowy fingers sweeping over the keys, lest they should make worse havoc with his heart-strings than they had already done. At an early hour he sought his chamber, where the livelong night he fought manfully with the love which, now that he acknowledged its existence, grew rapidly in intensity and strength. It was not like the love he felt for Isabel—it was deeper, purer, more absorbing, and what was stranger far than all, he could not feel that it was wicked, and he trembled when he thought how hardened he had become.

The next day, which was the Sabbath, he determined to see as little of Marian as possible, but when at the breakfast table she asked him in her usual frank, open-hearted way to go with her to church, he could not refuse, and he went, feeling a glow of pride at the sensation he knew she was creating, and wondering why she should be so excited.

"I cannot keep the secret much longer," Marian thought, as she looked upon the familiar faces of her friends, and longed to hear them call her by her real name. "I will at least tell Alice who I am, and if she can convince me that Frederic would be glad, I will perhaps explain to him."

When church was out, Mrs. Rivers, who still lived at her father's pressed forward for an introduction, and after it was over, whispered a few words to Frederic, who replied: "Not in the least," so decidedly that Marian heard him, and wondered what Agnes' remark could have been. She was not long left in doubt, for as they were riding home, Frederic turned to her and said: "Mrs. Rivers thinks you look like my wife."

Marian's cheeks were scarlet, as she replied:

"Josh and Hetty thought so, too, and it is possible there may be a resemblance."

"Not the slightest," returned Frederic, half vexed that anyone should presume to liken the beautiful girl at his side to one as plain as he had always considered Marian Lindsey to be.

Leaning back in the carriage, he relapsed into a thoughtful mood, which was interrupted once by Marian's asking if he believed he should know his wife in case he met her unexpectedly.

"Know her? Yes—from all the world!" was the hasty

answer; and, wrapping his shawl still closer about him, Frederic did not speak again until they stopped at their own door.

That night, as Marian sat with Alice in their chamber, she said to the little girl:

"If you could have any wish gratified which you chose to make, what would it be?"

For an instant Alice hesitated—then her eyes filled with tears, and, winding her arms around her teacher's neck, she whispered:

"At first I thought I'd rather have my sight—but only for a moment—and then I wished, if Marian were not dead, she would come back to us, for I'm afraid Frederic is getting bad again, though he cannot help it, I'm sure."

"What do you mean?" Marian asked, and Alice replied:

"Don't you know? Can't you guess? Don't you hear it in his voice when he speaks to you?"

Marian made no response, and Alice continued:

"Frederic seems determined to love everybody better than our Marian, and, though I love you more than I can tell, I want her to come back so much."

"And if you knew she were coming, when would you rather it should be?" asked Marian, and asked replied:

"Now—tonight; but as that is impossible, I'd be satisfied with Christmas. Yes, on the whole, I'd rather it would be then; I should call her our Christmas Gift, and it would be the dearest, sweetest one that I could have."

"Darling Alice," thought Marian, "your wish shall be gratified."

And, kissing the blind girl affectionately, she resolved that on the coming Christmas, one at least of the inmates of Redstone Hall should know that Marian Grey was only another name for the runaway Marian Lindsey.

One by one the bright November days went by and the hazy Indian summer light faded from the Kentucky hills, where now the December sun was shining cold and clear. And as the weeks passed away, there hung over Redstone Hall a dark, portentous cloud, and they who had waited so eagerly the coming of the holidays trembled lest the merry Christmas song should prove a funeral dirge for the pet and darling of them all. Alice was dying, so the physician said, while Dinah, too, had prophesied that ere the New Year came the eyes which never in this world had looked upon the light would be opened to the glories of the better land.

For many weary days and nights the fever flame had burned in the young girl's veins, but it had left her now, and like a

fragile lily she lay among her pillows, talking of heaven and the grave as something very near to her. Noiselessly Marian trod across the floor, holding back her breath and speaking in soft whispers, lest she should disturb the little sufferer whose side she never for a moment left except to take the rest she absolutely needed. Frederic, too, often shared her vigils, feeling almost as anxious for one as for the other. Both were very dear to him, and Marian, as she witnessed his tender care of Alice, and his anxiety for herself lest her strength should be overtaxed, felt more and more that he was worthy of her love. Alice, too, appreciated his goodness, as she had never done before, and once when he sat alone with her, and Marian was asleep, she passed her hand caressingly over her face and said:

"Dear Frederic, you have been so kind to me, that I am sure God has some good in store for you."

Then as she remembered what would probably be the greatest good to him, she continued: "I know what's in your heart, and I pity you so much, but there is light ahead, I'm sure. I've thought strange things, and dreamed strange dreams since I lay here so sick, and as I once was certain Marian was alive, so now I'm almost certain that she's dead."

"Hush, Alice, hush," said Frederic, laying his head upon the pillow beside her, but Alice did not heed him, and she continued:

"I never saw her in this world, and maybe I shan't know her right away, though next to mother, I reckon, she'll be the first to welcome me to heaven, if she's there, and I know she is, or we should have heard from her. I shall tell her of her old home, Frederic—tell her how we mourned for her when we thought that she was dead. I don't know what it was that made her go away, but I shall tell her you repented of the act, and how you looked for her so long, and that if you had found her you would have loved her sure. That will not be a lie, will it, Frederic?"

"No, darling, no," was the faintly-spoken answer, and Alice continued:

"Then, when I have explained all, I'll steal away from heaven, just long enough to come and tell you she is there. You'll be in the library, maybe, and I reckon 'twill be dark, though if you'd any rather, I'll come in the daytime, and when you feel there's somebody near, somebody you can't see, you may know that it is me come to say you are free to love the other Marian."

"Don't, Alice, don't," said Frederic, for it made his heart

bleed afresh to hear her talk of what he had no hope would ever be.

But Alice's faith was stronger, and to Marian Grey she sometimes talked in a similar strain, saying: "She knew she should meet the other one in heaven," and Marian, while listening to her, felt that she must undeceive her. "It may possibly make her better," she thought, and when, at last, the Christmas Eve had come, and it was her turn to watch that night, she determined to tell her, if she fancied that she had strength to bear it. One by one the family servants retired, and when at last they were alone, Marian drew her chair close to the bed, wondering how she should commence, and what effect it would have upon the little sufferer, who ere long awoke, and said to her:

"I've been dreaming of Marian, and I thought she looked like you do—but she don't, of course; and I wonder how I'll know her from my mother, for she, too, was young when she died. If it were you, Miss Grey, I could tell you so easily, for I should look among the brightest angels there, and the one who sang the sweetest song and had the fairest face, would certainly be Marian Grey; but the other Marian—how shall I know her—think?"

Leaning forward so that her hot cheek touched the pale one of the sick girl, Marian said:

"Wouldn't you know her by her voice?"

"I'm afraid not," answered Alice; "I thought you were she at first when I heard you speak."

"How is it now, darling!—how is it now?" Marian asked, in a voice so tremulous that Alice started, and her white face flushed as she replied: "You are not like her now, except at times, and then—it's all so queer. There's a mystery about you, Miss Grey—and it seems sometimes just like I didn't know what to think—you puzzle me so!"

"Shall I tell you, Alice? Have you strength to hear who and what I am?" Marian asked; and Alice answered eagerly:

"Yes—tell me—do!"

"And you'll promise not to faint, nor scream, nor reveal it to anybody, unless I say you may?"

Alice's cheek grew paler, and her eyes a deeper brown, as she said:

"It must be something terrible to make me faint or scream!"

"Not terrible, dearest, but strange!" and sitting down upon the bed, Marian wound her arm around the little girl.

It was a hazardous thing, the telling that secret then, but

Marian did not realize what she was doing, and in as calm a voice as she could command, she began:

"People call me Marian Grey, but that is not my name!"

"Not Marian Grey!" and the brown eyes flashed wonderingly. "Who are you, then; Marian what?"

Marian did not reply to this question, but said instead: "I had seen you before that night at Riverside."

"Seen me, where?" and the little figure trembled with an indefinable dread of the shock which she instinctively felt was awaiting her.

"I had seen you many times," said Marian; "and that is why my voice was familiar. Put your hand upon my face again and maybe you will know it."

"I can't, I can't! You frighten me so!" gasped Alice; and Marian continued:

"I must have changed much in the last five years, for they who used to know me have never suspected that I am in their midst again—none but Bruno. Do you remember my power over him? Bruno and I were playmates together!"

Marian paused and gazed earnestly at the child, who lay panting in her arms, her face upturned and the blind eyes fixed upon hers with an intensity she had never before seen equaled. In the deep stillness of the room she could hear the loud beating of Alice's heart, and see the bedclothes rise and fall with every throb.

"Alice," she said at last, "don't you know me now?" and in her voice there was a world of yearning tenderness and love.

"Yes," and over the marble face there shone a smile of almost seraphic sweetness. "You are Marian—my Marian—Frederic's Marian—Dinah's Marian—all of us Marian!" and with a low, hysterical cry the blind girl crept close to the bosom of her long-lost friend.

Stretching out her feeble arms she wound them around Marian's neck, and raising herself upon her elbow, kissed her lips, her cheek, her forehead, her hair, whispering all the time: "Blessed Marian—precious Marian—beautiful Marian—our Marian—Frederic's and mine, and everybody's. Oh, I don't want to go to heaven now; I'd rather stay with you. Call him—call Frederic, quick, and tell him! Why haven't you told him before? Ho, Frederic, come here!" and the feeble voice, raised to its highest pitch, went ringing through the room and penetrated even to the adjoining chamber, where, since Alice's illness, Frederic had slept.

"Alice," said Marian, "if you love me, you will not tell him now. I am not ready yet."

"What if I should die?" Alice asked, and Marian replied: "You won't die. I almost know you won't. Promise, Alice, promise," she continued, as she heard Frederic's step in the hall without.

"How can I—how can I? It will choke me to death!" was Alice's answer, and the next moment Frederic had crossed the threshold of the door.

"What is it, Miss Grey?" he asked. "Didn't you call?"

"Alice is rather excited, that's all," said Marian, "and you can go back. We do not wish to disturb you."

"Frederic," came in a faint whisper from the bedside, and knowing that further remonstrance was useless, Marian stood like a rock, while Frederic advanced toward the child, who lay with her head thrown back, the great tears rolling down her cheeks, and the great joy of what she had heard, shining out all over her little face.

"Did you want me, birdie?" he asked, but ere he had ceased speaking, Marian was at his side.

Alice knew that she was there, and she pressed both hands upon her lips to force back the secret she had been forbidden to divulge.

"Is she delirious?" Frederic asked, and, shaking her head, Alice whispered: "No, no, but happy, so happy. Oh, Frederic, I don't want to die! Must I? If I take a heap of doctor's stuff, will I get well, think?"

"I hope so," said Frederic, his suspicions of insanity rapidly increasing.

"Give me your hand," she continued, "and yours, too, Miss Grey."

Both were extended, and, joining them together, she said: "Love her, Frederic. Love her all you want to. You may—you may. It isn't wicked. Oh, Marian, Marian!"

The last word was a whisper, and as it died away, Marian seized Frederic's arm, and said, beseechingly: "Please, leave the room, Mr. Raymond. You see she is excited, and I can quiet her best alone. Will you go?"

The brown eyes looked reproachfully at her and entreatingly at him, but neither heeded the expression, and with a feeling that he scarcely understood what the whole proceeding meant, or why he had been called in if he must be so summarily dismissed, Frederic went out reluctantly, leaving Marian alone with Alice.

"Why didn't you let me tell him?" the latter asked, and

Marian replied: "I shall tell him by and by, but I am not ready yet, and you must not betray me."

"I'll try," said Alice, "but 'tis so hard, I had to bite my tongue to keep the words from coming. Where have you been? Why didn't you come to us before? What makes you be Marian Grey so long? How came you so beautiful—so grand?" Alice asked, all in the same breath.

But Marian absolutely refused to answer a question until she had become quiet and been refreshed with sleep.

"All in good time, dearest," she said; "but you must rest now. You are wearing out too fast, and you know you do not want to die."

This was the right chord to touch, and it had the desired effect.

"Let me ask one question, and say one thing," said Alice, "and I won't talk another word till morning. When you are ready, may I tell Frederic, if I ain't dead?"

"Yes, darling," was the ready answer, and winding her arms around Marian's neck, the blind girl continued: "Isn't it almost morning?"

"Yes, dear."

"And when it is, won't it be Christmas Day?"

"Yes, but you asked three questions instead of one."

"I know—I know; but what I want to say, is this: I wished my Christmas gift might be Marian, and it is. Last year it was a beautiful little pony, but you are worth ten hundred million ponies. Oh, I'm so glad—so glad," and on the childish face there was a look of perfect happiness.

Even after she shut her eyes and tried to sleep, her lips continued to move, and Marian could hear the whispered words: "Our own Marian—our blessed Marian."

The excitement was too much for Alice, and when next morning the physician came, he pronounced her worse than she had been the previous night.

"But I ain't going to die," said Alice resolutely; "I can't die now," and it was this very determination on her part which did more to save her life than all the doctor's drugs or Dinah's wonderful tears.

For many days she seemed hovering between life and death, while Marian never for a moment left her, and Alice was more quiet when she was sitting by, holding her feverish hand; she seemed to have lost her desire to tell, for she never made any attempt so to do, though she persisted in calling her teacher Marian, and a look of pain always flitted over her face when she heard her addressed as Miss Grey. Sometimes

she would start up, and, winding her arms around her neck, would whisper in her ear: "Are you Marian for sure—our Marian I mean?"

"Yes, Marian Lindsey sure," would be the answer, and the little girl would fall away again into a half unconscious state, a smile of joy wreathing her white lips, and an expression of perfect peace resting on her face.

At last, just as the New Year's morning dawned, she awoke from a deep, unbroken sleep, and Marian and Frederic, who watched beside her, knew that she was saved. There were weeks of convalescence, and Dinah often wondered at Alice's patience in staying so long and so willingly in the chamber where she had suffered so much. But to Alice that sick-room was a second paradise and Marian the bright angel whose presence made all the sunlight of her life.

Gradually, as she could bear it, Marian told her everything which had come to her since she left Redstone Hall, and Alice's eyes grew strangely bright when she heard that the bracelet she had always prized so much was made from Marian's hair, and that Ben's visit to Kentucky, was all a plan of his to see if Frederic were married. Greatly was she shocked when she heard of the letter which had almost taken Marian's life.

"Frederic never did that cruel thing," she knew.

"But 'twas in his handwriting," said Marian, "and until the mystery is cleared away, I cannot quite forgive him."

For a long time Alice sat absorbed in thought, then suddenly starting forward, she cried: "I know, Marian. I know now, Isabel did it. I'm sure she did. I remember it all so plain."

"Isabel?" repeated Marian; "how could she? What do you mean?"

"Why," returned Alice, "you say you sent it a few weeks after you went away, and I remember so well Frederic's going to Lexington one day, because that was the time it came to me that you were not dead. It was the first morning, too, that Isabel heard my lessons, and she scolded because I didn't remember quick, when I was thinking all the time of you, and my heart was aching so. For some reason, I can't quite tell what, I showed her that note you left for me. You remember it; don't you? It read:

"DARLING ALICE! PRECIOUS ALICE: If my heart were not already broken, it would break in leaving you."

"Yes, yes; I remember," said Marian, and Alice continued:

"She said your handwriting was queer, when she gave me back the note. That evening, Josh came from Frankfort with a heap of letters for Frederic, and one of them I know was from you. I was standing out under the bog maple tree thinking of you, when Isabel came and asked to take the note again, and I let her have it. Ever so long after, I started to go into the library, for I heard somebody rustling papers, and I didn't know but Dud was doing mischief. Just as I got to the door, I heard a voice like Isabel's, only it sounded scared like, exclaim: 'It is from her, but he shall never see it, never'; or something like that, and when I called to her she wouldn't answer me until I got close to her, and then she laughed as if she was choked, and said she was trying to frighten me. Marian, that 'her' was you, and the 'he' was Frederic. She copied his writing, and sent the letter back because she wanted Frederic herself."

"Could she do such a thing?" said Marian, more to herself than to Alice, who replied:

"She can do anything; for Dinah says she's one of the ——, I reckon that I'll skip that word in there, because it's almost swearing, but it means Satan's unaccountables," and Alice's voice dropped to a whisper at what she fancied to be profanity.

Marian could understand why Isabel should do such a wicked thing even better than Alice, and after reflecting upon it for a time, she accepted it as a fact, and even suggested the possibility of Isabel's having been the author of the letter from Sarah Green.

"She was! she was!" cried Alice, starting to her feet. "It's just like her—for she thought Frederic would surely want to marry her then. I know she wrote it, and managed to get it to New York somehow"; and as is often the case, poor Isabel was compelled to bear more than her share of the fraud, for Marian, too, believed that she had been in some way implicated with the letter from Sarah Green.

"And I may tell Frederic now—mayn't I?" said Alice. "Suppose we set tomorrow, when he's in the library among his letters. He'll wonder what I'm coming in there for, all wrapped up in shawls. But he'll know plenty quick, for it will be just like me to tell it all at once, and he will be so glad. Don't you wish it was tomorrow now?"

Marian could not say she did, for she had hoped for a more decisive demonstration of affection on Frederic's part ere she revealed herself to him, but Alice was so anxious, and had waited so patiently, that she at last consented, and when at supper she met Frederic as usual, she was conscious of a

different feeling toward him than she had ever experienced before. He seemed unusually dejected, though exceedingly kind to her, talking but little, it is true, but evincing, in various ways, the interest he felt in her, and ever asking her to sit with him a while ere returning to Alice's chamber. There was evidently something on his mind which he wished to say, but whatever it might have been, seven o'clock found it still unsaid, and as Alice retired at that hour, Marian arose to go.

"Must you leave me?" he said, rising, too, and accompanying her to the door. "Yes, you must!" and Marian little guessed the meaning these three words implied.

She only felt that she was not indifferent to him—that the story Alice was to tell him on the morrow would be received with a quiet kind of happiness at least—that he would not bid her go away, as she once had done before—and with the little blind girl, she, too, began to think the morrow would never come.

CHAPTER XXIV

TELLING FREDERIC

It was midnight, and from the windows of the library at Redstone Hall there shone a single light, its dim rays falling upon the haggard face of the weary man who, since parting from Marian in the parlor, had sat there just as he was sitting now—unmindful of the lapse of time—unmindful of everything save the fierce battle he was waging with himself. Hour by hour—day by day—week by week, had his love for Marian Grey increased, until now he could no more control it than he could stay the mighty torrent in its headlong course. It was all in vain that he kept or tried to keep Marian Lindsey continually before his mind, saying to himself: "She is my wife—she is alive, and I must not love another."

He did not care for Marian Lindsey. He did not wish to find her now—he almost hoped he never should, though even that would avail him nothing, unless he knew to a certainty that she were really dead. Perhaps he never could know, and as he thought of the long, dreary years in which he must live on with that terrible uncertainty forever haunting him, he pressed his hands upon his burning forehead and cried aloud: "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Oh, Marian Grey, can it be that you, who might have been the angel of my life, were sent to avenge the wrongs of that other Marian?"

He knew it was wicked, this intense, absorbing passion for Marian Grey, but he could not feel it so, and he would have given half his possessions for the sake of abandoning himself for one brief hour to this love—for the sake of seeing her eyes of blue meet his with the look he had so often fancied her giving to the man she loved. And she loved him! He was sure of it! He saw it those nights when he watched her by Alice's bedside; he had seen it since in the sudden flushing of her cheek and the falling of her eyes when he approached. And it was this discovery which prompted him to the act he meditated. Not both of them could stay there, himself and Marian, for he would not that she should suffer more than need be. She had recovered from her first and early love; she would get over this, and if she were only happy, it didn't matter how desolate her going would leave him, for she must

go, he said. He had come to that decision, sitting there alone, and it had wrung great drops of perspiration from his brow and moans of anguish from his lips. But it must be—there was no alternative, he thought, and in the chair where Marian Lindsey had once written her farewell, he wrote to Marian Lindsey's rival that Redstone Hall could be her home no longer.

"Think not that you have displeased me," he said, "for that is not why I send you from me. Both of us cannot stay, and though for Alice's sake I would gladly keep you here, it must not be. I am going to New Orleans, to be absent for three or four weeks, and shall not expect to find you here on my return. You will need money, and in inclose a check for a thousand dollars. Don't refuse to take it, for I give it willingly, and though my conduct is sadly at variance with my words, you must believe me when I say that in all the world you have not so true a friend as

"FREDERIC RAYMOND."

Many times he read this letter over, and it was not until long after midnight that he sought his pillow, only to toss from side to side with feverish unrest, and he was glad when at last Josh came in to make the fire, for by that token he knew it was morning.

"Tell Dinah I will breakfast in my room," he said, "and say to Phil that he must have the carriage ready early, for I am going to New Orleans, and he will carry me to Frankfort."

"Ye-e-s, sir," was Josh's answer, as he departed with the message.

"Marster have breakfast in his room and a-goin' to New Orleans? In the Lord's name what's happened to him?" exclaimed Dinah, and when Marian came down to her solitary meal, she repeated the story to her, asking if she could explain it.

"Marster's looked desput down in the mouth a long time back," she said, "and I was kinder hopin' he was thinkin' of jinin' the meetin' and being baptized, but 'pears 'tain't that. What you 'spect 'tis?"

Marian could not tell; neither did she venture a suggestion, so fearful was she that Frederic's intended departure would interfere with the plan of which Alice had talked incessantly since daylight. Hastily finishing her breakfast, she hurried back to her chamber, whither the note had preceded her.

"Luce brought this to you from Frederic," said Alice, passing her the letter, "and she says he looks like he was crazy. Read it and see what he wants."

Marian accordingly tore open the envelope and with blanched cheek and quivering lip read that she must go again from Redstone Hall, and worse than all, there was no tangible reason assigned for the cruel mandate. The check next caught her eye, and with a proud, haughty look upon her face, she tore it in fragments and scattered them upon the floor, for it seemed an idle mockery for him to offer what was already hers.

"What is it, Marian?" asked Alice, and, recovering her composure, Marian read to her what Frederic said, while Alice's face grew white as hers had done before.

"You go away!" she exclaimed, bounding upon the floor and feeling for the warm shawl which she wore when sitting up. "You won't do any such thing. You've as much right here as he has, and I'm going this minute to tell him so."

She had groped her way to the door and was just opening it, when Marian held her back, saying:

"You must not go out undressed and barefooted as you are. The halls are cold. Wait here while I go and learn the reason of this sudden freak."

"But I want so much to tell him myself," said Alice, and Marian replied: "So you shall; I'll send Dinah up to dress you, and then I will come for you when it is time."

This pacified Alice, who already began to feel faint with her exertions, and she crept back to bed, while Marian descended the stairs, going first to Dinah as she had promised, and then with a beating heart turning her steps toward the library. It was much like facing the wild beast in his lair, the confronting Frederic in his present savage mood. He felt himself as if his reason were overturned, for the deliberate giving up of Marian Grey, and the feeling that he should probably never look upon her face again, had stirred, as it were, the very depths of his heart's blood, and in a state of mind bordering on distraction, he was making the necessary preparations for his hasty journey when a timid knock was heard outside the door.

"Who's there? I'm very busy," was his loud, imperious answer, but Marian was not to be thus baffled, and turning the knob, she entered without further ceremony, recoiling backward a pace or two when she met the expression of Frederic's eye.

With his hands full of papers, which he was thrusting into

his pocket, his hair disordered and his face white as ashes, he turned toward her, saying: "Why are you here, Miss Grey? Haven't you caused me pain enough already? Have you received my note?"

"I have," she answered, advancing still farther into the room. "And I have come to ask you what it means. You have no right to dismiss me so suddenly without an explanation. How have I offended you? You must tell me."

"I said you had not offended," he replied, "and further than that I can give you no explanation."

"I shall not leave your house, nor yet this room until you do," was her decided answer, and with the air of one who meant what she said, Marian went so near to the excited man that he could have touched her had he chosen.

For an instant the two stood gazing at each other, Marian never wavering for an instant, while over Frederic's face there flitted alternately a look of wonder, admiration, and perplexity. Then that look passed away and was succeeded by an expression of the deep, unalterable love he felt for the beautiful girl standing so fearlessly before him.

"I cannot help it," he murmured at last, and, tottering to the door, he turned the key; then returning to Marian, he compelled her to sit beside him upon the sofa and passing his arm around her, so that she could not escape him, he began: "You say you will not leave the room until you know why I should send you from me. Be it so, then. It surely cannot be wrong for me to tell when you thus tempt me to the act; so, for one brief half hour, you are mine—mine, Marian, and no power can save you from hearing what I have to say."

His looks, even more than his manner, frightened her, and she said, imploringly: "Give me the key, Mr. Raymond. Unlock the door and I will go away without hearing the reason."

"I frighten you, then," he answered, in a gentler tone, drawing her nearer to him, "and yet, Marian Grey, I would sell my life inch by inch rather than harm a hair of your dear head. Oh, Marian, Marian, I would to Heaven you had never crossed my path, for then I should not have known what it is to love as madly, as hopelessly, as wickedly as I now love you. What made you come to me in all your bright, girlish beauty, or why did Heaven suffer me to love you as I do? My punishment was before as great as I could bear and now I must suffer this anguish, too. Oh, Marian Grey, Marian Grey!"

He wound his arms close around her, and she could feel his feverish breath as his lips almost touched her burning cheek. In the words "Marian Grey, Marian Grey," there was a deep

pathos, as if all the loving tenderness of his nature were centered upon that name, and it brought the tears in torrents from her eyes. He saw them, and, wiping them away, he said:

"The hardest part of all to me is the knowledge that you must suffer, too. Forgive me for saying it, but as I know that I love you, so by similar signs I know that you love me. Is it not so darling?"

Involuntarily she laid her head upon his bosom, sobbing:

"I have loved you so long—so long."

But for her promise to Alice, she would then have told him all, but she must keep her word, and when he rejoined: "It does, indeed, seem long since that night you came to Riverside," she did not undeceive him, but listened while he continued: "Bless you for telling me of your love. When you are gone it will be a comfort for me to think that Marian Grey once loved me. I say once, for you must overcome that love. You must tear it out and trample it beneath your feet. You can if you try. You are not as hard, as callous as I am. My heart is like adamant, and though I know that it is wicked to love you, and to tell you of my love. I cannot help it. I am a wreck, and when I tell you, as I must, just what a wretch I am, it will help you to forget me—to hate me, it may be. You have heard of my wife. You know she left me on my bridal night, and I have never known the joys of wedded bliss—never shall know, for even if she comes back to me now, I cannot live with her!"

"Oh, Frederic!" And again the hot tears trembled through the hands which Marian clasped before her eyes.

"Don't call me thus," said Frederic entreatingly, as he removed her hands, and held them both in his. "Don't say Frederic, for though it thrills me with strange joy to hear you, it is not right. Listen, Marian, while I tell you why I married her who bears my name, and then I'm sure you'll hate me—nor call me Frederic again. I have never told but one, and that one, William Gordon. I had thought never to tell it again, but it is right that you should know. Marian Lindsey was, or is, the heiress of Redstone Hall. All my boasted wealth is hers—every cent of it is hers. But she didn't know it, for"—and Frederic voice was very low and plaintive now as he told to Marian Grey how Marian Lindsey was an heiress—told her of his dead parent's fraud—of his desire to save that parent's name from disgrace, and his stronger desire to save himself from poverty. "So I made her my wife," he said. "I promised to love and cherish her all the time my heart was longing for another."

Marian trembled now, as she lay helpless in his arms, and, observing it, he continued:

"I must confess the whole, and tell you that I loved, or thought I loved Isabel Huntington, though how I could have fancied her is a mystery to me now. My poor Marian was plain, while Isabel was beautiful, and naught but Alice kept me from telling her my love. Alice stayed the act—Alice sent me to New York to look for Marian—"

"And did you never hear from her? Did she never send you a letter?" Marian asked, and he replied:

"Never! If she had, I should have known where to find her."

Then, as briefly as possible, for he knew time was hastening, he told of his fearful sickness, and of the little girl who took care of him—told, too, of his weary search for her, and of the many dreary nights he passed in thinking of her and her probable fate.

"Then you came," he said, "and struggle as I would, I could not mourn for Marian Lindsey as I had done before. I was satisfied to have you here until the conviction burst upon me, that far greater than any affection I had thought I could feel for that blue-eyed girl, and tenfold greater than any love I had felt for Isabel Huntington, was my love for you. It has worn upon me terribly. Look!" And, pushing back his thick, brown locks, he showed her where the hair was turning white beneath. "These are for you," he said. "There are furrows upon my face—furrows upon my heart—and can you wonder that I bade you go, and so no longer tempt me to sin? And yet, could I longer keep you with me, Marian? Could I hold you to my bosom, just as I hold you now, and know I had a right so to do?—a right to call you mine—my Marian—my wife? Not Heaven itself, I'm sure, has greater happiness in store for those who merit its bliss than this would be to me! Oh, why is the boon denied to me? Why must I suffer on through wretched, dreary years, and know that somewhere in the world there is a Marian Grey, who might have been my wife?"

"Let me go for Alice," said Marian, struggling to release herself. "There is something she would tell you."

"Yes, in a moment," he replied; "but promise me first one thing. The news may come to me that I am free, and if it does, and you are still unmarried, will you then be my wife? Promise that you will, and the remembrance of that promise will help me to bear a little longer."

"I do!" said Marian, standing up before him, and holding

one of his hands in hers. "I promise you, solemnly, that no other man shall ever call me wife save you."

There were tears in Frederic's eyes, and his whole frame quivered with emotion, as, catching at her dress, for she was moving toward the door, he added:

"And you will wait for me, darling—wait for me twenty years, if it needs must be? You will never be old to me. I shall love you just the same when these sunny locks are gray," and he passed his hands caressingly over her bright hair. There was a world of love and tenderness in the answering look which Marian gave to him as he opened the door for her to pass out, and wringing his hands in anguish, he cried to himself: "Oh, how can I give her up—beautiful, beautiful Marian Grey!"

Swift as a bird Marian flew up the stairs in quest of Alice, who was to tell the wretched man that it was not a sin for him to love the beautiful Marian Grey.

"Alice, Alice! Go now—go quick!" she exclaimed, bursting into the room.

"Go whar—for the dear Lord's sake," said Dinah, who had that moment come up, and consequently had made but little progress in dressing Alice. "Go whar? Not down stars—'strue as yer born she'll cotch her death o' cold!"

"Hurry—do!" cried Alice, standing first on one foot and then upon the other. "I must tell Frederic something before he goes away. There, he's going! Oh, Marian, help!" she fairly screamed, as she heard the carriage at the door, and Frederic in the hall below.

Marian was terribly excited and in her attempts to assist, she only made matters worse by buttoning the wrong button, putting both stockings on the same foot, pulling the shoe-lacing into a hard knot, which baffled all her nervous efforts, while Dinah worked on leisurely, insisting that Alice "wasn't gwine down, and if thar was anythin' killin' which marster 'or'to know, Miss Grey could tell him herself."

"Yes, Marian, go," said Alice, at last in despair as she heard Dud bid good-by and scarcely conscious of what she was about, Marian ran down the stairs, just as Phil cracked his whip and the spirited grays bounded off with a rapidity which left her faint call of "Stop, Frederic, stop!" far behind.

"I can write to him," she thought, as she slowly retraced her steps back to Alice, who was bitterly disappointed, and who, after Dinah was gone, threw herself upon the bed, refusing to be comforted.

"Three weeks was forever," she said, and she suggested

sending Josh after the traveler, who, in a most unenviable frame of mind, was riding rapidly toward Frankfort.

"No, no," said Marian. "I will write immediately, so he can get the letter as soon almost as he reaches New Orleans. It won't be three weeks before he returns," and she strove to divert the child's mind by repeating to her as much as she thought proper of her exciting interview with Frederic.

But Alice could not be comforted, and all that day she lamented over the mischance which had taken Frederic away before she could tell him.

"There's Uncle Phil," she said, when toward night she heard the carriage drive into the yard; "and hark, hark!" she exclaimed, turning her quick ear in the direction of the sound, and rolling her bright eyes around the room; "there's a step on the piazza that sounds like his—'tis him—'tis him! He's come back! I knew he would!" and in her weakness and excitement the little girl sank exhausted at Marian's feet.

Raising her up, Marian listened breathlessly, but heard nothing save Phil, talking to his horses as he drove them to the stable.

"He has not come," she said, and Alice replied: "I tell you he has. There—there; don't you hear?" and Marian's heart gave one great bound as she, too, heard the well-known footstep upon the threshold and Frederic speaking to his favorite Dud, who had run to meet "his mars," asking for sugar plums from New Orleans.

There had been a change in the time table, and Frederic did not reach Frankfort until after the train he intended to take had gone. His first thought was to remain in the city, and wait for the next train from Lexington, as he had some business to transact. Accordingly he gave his parting directions to Phil, who, being in no haste to return, loitered away the morning and a portion of the afternoon before he turned his horses homeward. As he was riding up the long hill which leads from Frankfort into the country beyond, he unexpectedly met his master, who had been to the cemetery, and was just returning to the Capitol Hotel.

All the day Frederic had thought of Marian Grey, and with each thought it had seemed to him more and more that he must see her again, if only to hear her say that she would wait all time for him, and when he came upon Phil, whom he supposed was long ere this at Redstone Hall, his resolution was taken, and instead of the reproof he knew he merited, Phil was surprised at hearing his master say, as he made a motion for him to stop:

"Phil, I am going home."

And thus it was that he returned again to Redstone Hall, where his coming was hailed with eager joy by Marian and Alice, and created much surprise among the servants.

"My 'pinion he's a little out of his head," was all the satisfaction Phil could give, as he drove the carriage to the barn, while Frederic, half repenting of his rashness in returning, and wondering what good excuse he could render, went to his own room—the one formerly occupied by his father—where he sat before the glowing grate, when Alice appeared covered with shawls and her face all aglow with excitement.

She would not be kept back another moment, lest he should go off again, so Marian had wrapped her up and sent her on her mission. Frederic sat with his face turned toward the fire, and though by the step he knew who it was that entered at the door, he did not turn his head or evince the least knowledge of her presence until she stood before him, and said, inquiringly:

"Frederic, are you here?"

"Yes," was the answer, rather curtly spoken, for he would rather be alone.

"Frederic!" and the bundle of shawls trembled violently. "I have come to tell you something about Marian."

"I don't wish to hear it," was his reply; and, nothing daunted, Alice continued:

"But you must hear me. Her name isn't Miss Grey. She is a married woman, and has a living husband; and you—"

She did not finish the sentence, for like a tiger Frederic started up, and seizing her by the shoulders, exclaimed: "You dare not tell me that again. Marian Grey is not married. She never had a husband," and as the maddening thought swept over him, that possibly the blind girl told him truly, he staggered against the mantel, where he stood panting for breath and enduring as it were all the agonies of a lingering painful death.

"Sit down," said Alice, and like a very child, he obeyed, while she proceeded: "Miss Grey has deceived us all and it is strange, too, that none of us should know her—none but Bruno. Don't you remember how he wouldn't bite her, just because he knew her when we didn't? Don't you mind how I told you once maybe the Marian who went away would come back to us some day so beautiful we should not know her? You are listening, ain't you?"

"Yes, yes," came in a quick, sharp gasp from the armchair.

"Well, she has come back! She called herself Marian Grey,

so we would not guess right off who she was, but she ain't Marian Grey. She's the other one—she's my Marian, Frederic, and your wife—"

As Alice was speaking Frederic had risen to his feet. Drop by drop every particle of blood receded from his face, leaving it colorless as ashes. There was a wild unnatural light flashing from his eyes—his hands worked nervously together—his hair seemed starting from its roots, and with his head bent forward, he stood, transfixed, as it were, by the dazzling light which had burst upon him. Then his lips parted slowly and more like a wailing cry than a prayer of thanksgiving, the words: "I thank Thee, oh, my God," issued from them. The next moment the air near Alice was set in rapid motion—there was a heavy fall, and Frederic Raymond lay upon the carpet white and still as a block of marble.

Like lightning Alice flew across the floor, but swift as were her movements, another was there before her, and with his head upon her lap was pressing burning kisses upon his lips and dropping showers of tears upon his face. Marian had stood without the door listening to that dialogue, and when by the fall she knew that it was ended, she came at once and knelt by the fainting man, who ere long began to show signs of consciousness. Alice was the first to discover this, and when sure that he would soon come back to life, she glided silently from the room, for she knew full well that she would not be needed there.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE LOST ONE HAS RETURNED"

SHE might have tarried yet a little longer, for the shock to Frederic had been so sudden and so great that though his lips moved and his fingers clutched eagerly at the soft hand feeling for his pulse, he did not seem to heed aught else, until Marian whispered in his ear:

"My husband—may I call you so?"

Then, indeed, he started from his lethargy, and, struggling to his feet, clasped her in his arms, weeping over her passionately, and murmuring as he did so:

"My wife—my darling—my wife! Is it true that you have come to me again? Are you my Marian?"

Daylight was fading from the room, for the winter sun had set behind the western hills, and leading her to the window, he turned her face to the light, gazing rapturously upon it, and saying to her:

"You are mine—all mine! God bless you, Marian!"

He kissed her hands, her neck, her lips, her forehead, her hair, and she could feel his hot tears falling amid the shining curls he parted so lovingly from her brow. They were not hateful to him now—these silken tresses—and he passed his hand caressingly over them, whispering all the while:

"My own beautiful Marian—my bride—my wife!"

"Surely, in this moment of bliss, Marian felt repaid for all that she had suffered, and when at last as thoughts of the dreadful past came to Frederic, he led her to the sofa, and said: "Can you forgive me, darling?" she turned her bright eyes up to his, and by the expression of perfect happiness resting there, he knew she had forgotten the cold, heartless words he spoke to her, when once, at that very hour, and in that very place, he asked her to be his. That scene had faded away, leaving no cloud between them. All was sunshine and gladness, and with her fair head resting on his bosom—not timidly, as it had lain there in the morning, but trustingly, confidingly, as if that were its rightful resting place—they sat together until the rose-red tinge faded from the western sky, and the night shadows had crept into the room.

More than once Alice stole on tiptoe to the door, to see if it

were time for her to enter, but as often as she heard the low murmur of their voices, she went noiselessly back, saying to herself: "I won't disturb them yet."

At last as she came once she stumbled accidentally, and this awoke Marian from the sweetest dream which ever had come to her.

"'Tis Alice," she said; "she surely may come to us now," and she called to the little girl, who came gladly, and climbing into Frederic's lap, twined her arms around his neck and laid a cheek against his own, without word of comment.

"Blessed Alice, I owe you more than I can repay," he said, and Marian, far better than the child, appreciated the full meaning those words conveyed.

But for the helpless blind girl this hour might never have come to them, and the strong man felt it so, as he hugged the little creature closer to him, blessing her as his own and Marian's good angel. Observing that she shivered as if with cold, he arose, and drawing the sofa directly before the fire, resumed his seat again, with Marian between himself and Alice, his arm around her neck and his lips almost constantly meeting hers. He could not remove his eyes from her, she seemed to him so beautiful, with the firelight falling on her sparkling face and shining on her hair. That hair—how it puzzled him, and winding one of the curls about his fingers he said, half laughingly, half reluctantly: "Your hair was not always this color."

Then the blue eyes flashed up into his with the glance he loved so, and Marian replied by telling him whence came the change, and reminding him that she was the same young girl of whom the Yankee Ben had spoken when he visited Kentucky.

"And you had almost died, then, for me, my precious one," said Frederic, kissing the sunny locks.

Just at this point old Dinah appeared in the door, which, like most Kentucky doors, was left ajar. She saw the position of the parties—saw Frederic kiss Marian Grey—saw Alice's look of satisfaction as he did so, and in an instant all the old lady's sense of propriety was aroused to a boiling pitch.

Since Marian had revealed herself to Alice, the little girl had said to Dinah, by way of preparing her for the surprise when it should come, that "there was some doubt concerning the death of Marian—that Frederic believed she had been with him in New York, and had taken means to find her." This story was, of course, repeated among the servants, some of whom credited it, while others did not. Among the latter

was Dinah. She wouldn't believe "she had done all her mournin' for nothin'," and in opposition to Hetty, she persisted in saying Marian was dead. When, however, she saw her master's familiarity with Miss Grey, she accepted her young mistress' existence as a reality, and was terribly incensed against the offending Marian Grey.

"The trollop!" she muttered. "But I'll bring proof agin' her," and hurrying back to the kitchen, she told the astonished blacks, "how't marster done kissed Miss Grey spang on her har, and on her mouth, and hugged her into the bargain, when he didn't know for certain that t'other one was dead; and if they didn't believe it, they could go and see for themselves, provided they went mighty still."

"Tole ye he was crazy," said Uncle Phil, starting to see the wonderful sight, and followed by a troop of negroes, all of whom trod on tiptoe, a precaution wholly unnecessary, for Frederic and Marian were too much absorbed in each other to heed the dusky group assembled around the door, their white eyes growing larger as they all saw distinctly the arm thrown across Marian's neck.

"Listen to dat ar, will you," whispered Hetty, as Frederic said, "Dear Marian," while old Dinah chimed in, "'Clar for't, it makes my blood bile and he not a widower nuther!"

"Quit dat!" she exclaimed aloud, as the master showed signs of repeating the kissing offense; and, in an instant, Frederic sprang to his feet, an angry flush mounting to his face when he saw the crowd at the door.

Then, as he began to comprehend its meaning, the frown gave place to a good-humored laugh, and taking Marian's hand, he led her toward the assembled blacks, saying to them:

"Rejoice with me that the lost one has returned to us again, for this is Marian Lindsey—my wife and your mistress—changed, it is true, but the same Marian who went from us more than five years ago."

"Wonder if he 'spects us to swaller dat ar?" said the unbelieving Hetty.

Dinah, on the contrary, had not the shadow of a doubt, and though she had long since abjured a kneeling position, when saying her prayers, it took her so long to rise on account of her great weight, she now dropped down at once, kissing the very hem of Marian's dress, and exclaiming through her tears:

"Lord bress you, Miss Marian. You've mightily altered, to be sure, but ain't none the wus for that. I'm nothin' but a

poor old nigger, and can't say what's in my heart, but it's full and runnin' over, bless you, honey."

Dinah's example was contagious, and more than one prostrated themselves before their mistress, while their howling cries of surprise and delight were almost deafening. Particularly was Josh delighted, and while the noise went on, he took occasion to "balance your partner," in the hall, with a young yellow girl, who thought his stammering was music, and his ungainly figure the most graceful that could be conceived. When the commotion had in a measure subsided, and Hetty had gone over to the popular side, saying, "she knew from the first that Marian was somebody," Frederic made a few brief explanations as to where their mistress had been, and then dismissed them to their several duties, for he preferred being alone again with his wife and Alice.

Supper was soon announced, but little was eaten by anyone. They were too much excited for that, and as soon as the meal was over, they returned to Frederic's room, where, sitting again between her husband and Alice, Marian told them, as far as possible, everything which had come to her since leaving Redstone Hall.

"Can't I ever know what made you go away?" Alice asked; and Frederic replied:

"Yes, birdie, you shall"; and, without sparing himself in the least, Frederic told her all.

"Marian is an heiress, too!" she exclaimed. "Will marvels never cease?" and she laid her head, which was beginning to grow weary, upon Marian's lap, saying: "I never knew till now one-half how good you are. No wonder Frederic thought that he had killed you. It was wicked in him, very," and the brown eyes looked sleepily into the fire, while Marian replied:

"But it is all forgotten now."

It did seem to be, and in the long conversation which lasted till almost midnight, there was many a word of affection exchanged, many a confession made, many a forgiveness asked, and when, at last they parted, it was with the belief that each was all the world to the other.

Like lightning the news spread through the neighborhood that Frederic Raymond's governess was Frederic Raymond's wife; and, for many days the house was thronged with visitors, most of whom remembered little Marian Lindsey, and all of whom offered their sincere congratulations to the beautiful Marian Grey, for so she persisted in being called, until the night of the twentieth of February, when they were to give a bridal party. Then she would answer to Mrs. Ray-

mond, she said, but not before, and with this Frederic was fain to be satisfied. Great were the preparations for that party, to which all their friends were to be bidden, and as they were one evening making out the list, Marian suggested Isabel, more for the sake of seeing what Frederic would say than from any desire to have her present.

"Isabel," he repeated, "never. I cannot so soon forget her treachery," and a frown darkened his handsome face, but Marian kissed it away as she said:

"You surely will not object to Ben, the best and truest friend I ever had."

"Certainly not," answered Frederic. "I owe Ben Burt more than I can ever repay, and I mean to keep him with us. He is just the man I want for my farm—your farm, I mean," he added, smiling knowingly upon her, and catching in his the little hand raised to shut his mouth.

But Marian had her revenge by refusing to let him kiss her until he had promised never to allude to that again.

"I gave you Redstone Hall," she said, "that night I ran away, and I have never taken it back, but have brought you in instead an incumbrance which may prove a most expensive one." And amid such pleasantries as these Marian wrote the note to Ben, and then went back to her preparations for the party, which, together with the strange discovery, was the theme of the whole country.

CHAPTER XXVI

BEN

Ben sat among his boxes and barrels cracking hickory nuts and carrying on a one-sided conversation with the well-fed cat and nine beautiful kittens, which were gamboling over the floor, the terror of rats and mice and the pride of their owner, who found his heart altogether too tender to destroy any one of them by the usual means of drowning or decapitation. So he was literally killing them with kindness, and with his ten cats and odd ways was the wonder and favorite of the entire village.

The night was dark and stormy, and fancying he had dismissed his last customer he had settled himself before the glowing stove with nearly half a peck of nuts at his side, when the door opened, and a little boy came in, his light hair covered with snow, which had also settled upon other portions of his person.

"Good-evenin' Sandy," was Ben's saluation. "What brung you here tonight?"

"Got you a letter," returned Sandy, who was the chore boy of the postmaster. "It's been a good while coming, too, for all it says 'in haste,'" and passing the note to Ben, he caught up five or six of the kittens, while Ben, tearing open the envelope and snuffing his tallow candle with his fingers, read:

"Dear Ben: Frederic knows it all, and we are so happy. We are to have a great party on the twentieth, and you must surely come. Don't fail us, that's a dear, good Ben, but come as soon as you get this. Then I will tell you what I can't write now, for Frederic keeps worrying me so with teasing me to kiss him.

"Yours truly,

"Marian.

"P. S.—Alice sends her love, and so does Frederic, and so do I, dear Ben."

"I 'most wish she'd left off that last, and that about his kissin' her," said Ben, when, after the boy Sandy departed he was alone. "It makes me feel so streaked like. Guy,

wouldn't I give all my groceries, and the ten cats into the bargain, to be in Fred Raymond's boots"; and, taking up the kitten he called "Marian Grey," he fondled it tenderly, for the sake of her whose name it bore. "I shall go to this party," he continued, as his mind reverted again to the letter, "though I'll be as much out of place as a toad in a sugar bowl; but I can see Marian, and that little blind girl, and Josh. Wa'n't he a case, though?" And, leaning back in his chair, Ben mentally made the necessary arrangements for leaving.

These arrangements were next day carried into effect, and as he must start at once if he would be there in time for the party, he took the night express for Albany, having left his feline family to the care of the boy Sandy. The second night found him on the train between Buffalo and Cleveland, and as the weather was very cold and the seat near the stove unoccupied, he appropriated it to himself, and was just falling away to sleep, when a lady, wrapped in velvet and furs, with a thickly dotted veil over her face, came up to him, and said, rather haughtily:

"Can I have this seat, sir? I prefer it to any other."

"So do I," returned Ben; "but bein' you're a woman, I'll give it up, I guess."

And he sought another, of which there were plenty, for it was the last car, and not one-third full.

"Considerable kind o' toppin'," was his mental comment, as he coiled himself in his shaggy overcoat for a second time, sleeping ere long so soundly that nothing disturbed him, until at last, as they turned a short curve, the car was detached from the others, and, leaving the track, was precipitated down an embankment, which, fortunately, was not very steep, so that none were killed, although several were wounded, and among them the lady who had so unceremoniously taken possession of Ben's comfortable seat.

"Wall, now," said Ben, crawling out of a window, and holding fast to his hat, which, being new, was his special care, "if this ain't a little the imperlitest way of wakin' a feller out of a sound sleep, to pitch him head over heels in among these blackb'ry bushes and stuns; but who the plague is that a-screechin' so?—a woman's voice, too!"

And with all his gallantry aroused, Ben went to the rescue, feeling his way through briers, and glass, and broken pieces of the car, until he reached the human form struggling beneath the ruins, in close proximity to the hissing stove.

"Easy, now, my gal," he said, lifting her up. "Haul yer foot out, can't you?"

"No, no, it's crushed"; and Ben's knees shook beneath him at the cry of pain.

Relief soon came from other sources, and as this lady seemed more seriously injured than either of the other passengers, she was carried carefully to a dwelling near by, and laid upon a bed, before Ben had a chance to see her features distinctly.

"Pretty well jammed," said he, examining the bonnet, which the women of the farmhouse had removed.

Supposing he meant herself, the lady moaned:

"Oh, sir, is my face entirely crushed?"

"I meant your bonnet," returned Ben; "though if I was to pass judgment on you, I should say some of your feathers was crumpled a little; but, law, beauty ain't but skin deep. It's good, honest actions that make folks liked."

And, taking the lamp, he bent down to investigate, discovering, to his utter amazement, that the lady was none other than Isabel Huntington!

Some weeks before, and ere Marian's identity with Frederic's wife had been made known, Mrs. Rivers had invited her to visit Kentucky, and as there was now nothing in Yonkers to interest her, she had accepted, with the forlorn hope that in spite of Frederic's improbable story about a living wife, he might eventually be won back to his old allegiance. Accordingly, she had taken the same train and car with Ben, and by rather rudely depriving him of his seat near the stove, had been considerably injured, receiving several flesh wounds, besides breaking her ankle. For this last, however, she did not care; that would get well again; but her face—was it so disfigured as to spoil her boasted beauty? This was her constant thought as she lay moaning upon her pillows, and when for a few moments she was alone with Ben, whom she knew to be a Yankee peddler, and who considered it his duty to stay with her, she said to him:

"Please, Mr. Butterworth, tell me just how much I am bruised, and whether I shall probably be a fright the rest of my days."

"Wall, now," returned Ben, taking the lamp a second time and coming nearer to her, "there's no knowin' how you will look hereafter, but the fact is you ain't none too han'some now, with your face swelled as big as two, and all scratched up with them pesky briers."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Isabel, "but the swelling will go down and the scratches will get well. That isn't all."

"You're right," said Ben, peering curiously at her; "that

ain't all. You know, I s'pose, that six of your front teeth are knocked out."

"Yes, but false ones will remedy that. I'll have them made a little uneven so as to look natural; go on!"

"Wall," continued Ben, "you've fixed your teeth, but what are you going to do with your broken nose?"

"Oh!" screamed Isabel, clasping her hand to that organ, which, from its classic shape, had been her special pride. "Not broken—is it broken, true?"

"Looks mighty like it," answered Ben, "but law! doctors can do anything. They'll tinker it up so it will answer to sneeze out of and smell with as good as ever; and they'll sew up that ugly gash, too, that runs like a Virginny fence from your ear up onto your forehead and part of your cheek. Looks as though there'd been a scar of some kind there before," and looking closer, Ben saw the mark which the hot iron had made that night when the proud Isabel had given the cruel blow to the blind girl.

This she had heretofore managed to conceal by combing over it her hair, but nothing could hide the seam she knew would always be upon her forehead and cheek.

"Oh, I wish I could die," she groaned, "if I must be so mutilated."

"Pshaw! no you don't," returned Ben, now acting the part of a consoler. "Your eyes ain't damaged, nor your hair neither, only singed a little with the stove. There's some white ones, I see, but they must have been there before. Never used Wood's brimstony stuff, did you? That'll keep it from turnin'. I knew a chap once with a broke nose that looked like the notch in the White Mountains, and nobody thought of it, he was so good. Maybe yourn ain't so bad. Perhaps it's only out of jint. The doctor'll know—here he comes," and Ben stood back respectfully, while the physician examined the nature and extent of Isabel's injuries.

There was nothing serious, he said; nothing from which she would not recover. She was only stunned and bruised, besides having a broken ankle. The cut on the face would probably leave a scar, and the nose never be straight again, otherwise she would ere long be as well as ever, but she must of course remain where she was for two or three weeks, and he asked if she had friends with her.

"No," she said, while Ben said: "Yes, I'm her friend, and though I want to go on the wust way, I'll stay till her mother comes. We'd better telegraph, I guess."

This brought the tears from the heartless Isabel, for she

appreciated Ben's kindness in not deserting her, and when again they were alone, she thanked him for so generously staying with her when she heard him say he wished to go on.

"Were you going to Kentucky?" she asked, and Ben replied: "Yes, goin' to see how Miss Raymond looks at the head of a family. You've heard, I s'pose, that Marian Grey was Fred's runaway wife, and that they are happy now as any two clams."

Unmindful of the fierce twinges of pain it gave her to move, Isabel started up, exclaiming: "No, no, how can that be?"

"Jest as easy," said Ben, proceeding to narrate a few particulars to his astonished listener, who, when he had finished, lay back again upon her pillow, weeping bitterly.

This, then, was the end of all her secret hopes. Frederic was surely lost to her; the beautiful Marian Grey was his wife, and what was worse than all, her treachery was undoubtedly suspected, and what must they think of her? Poor Isabel, she was in a measure suffering for her sins, and she continued to weep while Ben tried in vein to soothe her, talking to her upon the subject uppermost in his mind, namely, Marian's happiness and his own joy that it had all come right at last. Isabel would rather have heard anything else, but when she saw how kind Ben was, she compelled herself to listen, even though every word he said of Marian and Frederic pierced her with a keener pain that even her bruises produced.

"I shan't be in time for the doin's anyway," thought Ben, when Mrs. Huntington did not come at the expected time, and as he fancied it his duty to let Marian know why he was not there, he telegraphed to her: "We've had a breakdown, and Isabel is knocked into a cocked-up hat."

This telegram, which created no little sensation at the office, was copied verbatim, and sent to Frederic, who read it, while Marian, in her chamber, was dressing for the party. He could not forbear laughing heartily, it sounded so much like Ben, but he wisely determined to keep it from his wife and Alice, as it might cause them unnecessary anxiety. He accordingly thrust it into his pocket, and then, when it was time, went up for Marian, who, in her bridal dress of satin and lace, with pearls and diamonds woven among her shining hair, looked wondrously beautiful to him, and received many words of commendation from the guests, who soon began to appear, and who felt that the bride of Redstone Hall well became her high position. Many were the pleasant jokes passed

at Frederic's expense, and the clergyman who had officiated at his wedding more than five years before, laughingly offered to repeat the ceremony. But Frederic shook his head, saying he was satisfied if Marian was, while the look the beautiful, blushing bride gave to him was quite as expressive of her answer as words would have been. And so, amid smiles and congratulations, the song and the dance moved on, and all went merry as a marriage bell, until at last, as the clock told the hour of midnight, the last guest had departed, and Frederic, with his arm around Marian, was calling her Mrs. Raymond, on purpose to see her blush, when there came up the avenue the sound of rapid wheels, followed by a bound on the the piazza, and the next moment Ben burst into the room, holding up both hands, as he caught sight of Marian in her bridal robes.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed. "Ain't she pretty, though? It's curis how clothes will fix up a woman."

THE END